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CLIMATE INCORPORATED

by JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

Shaken by earthquake, London was changed beyond recognition. And in the rubble, the dark secret of this chain of destruction lay suddenly revealed!

CLIMATE INCORPORATED

Illustration by Russell MacInnis

FOR a long time Alvin Brook had been standing by the window of the lounge, watching the rain fall. And the longer he watched the more grim his face became.

"Well, dear, what's the chances? Do we go on that picnic or don't we? Will it clear up?" Alvin turned, aware of the voice of his wife Nancy. She had just come into the room, a young and pretty woman, but at this moment she was looking a trifle depressed.

"Chances?" Alvin repeated, then he laughed shortly. "There just aren't any! We're not going on any picnic in this deluge. You can forget all about it."

Expressively she gave a little shiver, and rubbed her bare arms. She was wearing a light summer dress for no other reason than that the calendar said it was June.

"June in name only," Alvin said, his voice becoming grim. "This, the third time we've tried to go on a picnic and been spoiled by the weather. Rain, cold winds, and never a glimpse of the sun, except on days when we can't make use of it. It's absolutely idiotic!"

"I agree, but there's absolutely nothing which can be done about it. . . . In fact," Nancy continued, "I don't know why you didn't foresee a day like this. You're a big noise in the Met office, aren't you? You've got all the charts round you. You said it was going to be fine and warm. Remember all that talk you gave me about anti-somewhere-otherwise."

"Anticyclone, off the Azores," Alvin mused. "Yes, it ought to have extended a high pressure ridge and given good weather, but something must have gone wrong. A lot of things have gone galloped in and upset everything. Don't blame the Met men. That sort of thing's always happening in this hazy climate."

"It's not it," she said in this day and age, that something isn't done about it. We can invent H-bombs to destroy whole nations, yet we have to put up with deluges and hurricanes when we expect just unbroken sun. David's terribly disappointed. He's sulking in the kitchen over the unpacked picnic basket."

"Silly lad," Alvin growled. "Sulks won't do any good."

"Then you'd better tell him why they won't. I've pictured you as a hero as far as he is concerned, telling him his marvellous daddy has got it all worked out for sunshine. . . . And look at it!"

"Look here, Nancy, this is not my fault," Alvin stated deliberately. "I can ring up the Met office and have them satisfy you that all the forecast I made last night was correct, as the conditions were then."

"None of which would help us to have our chicken sandwiches under a hot sun!" As a Met man you ought to do something about it!" "For instance?" Alvin growled. "Do you think I'm some miracle worker who can stand up and shout 'Cease!' to the elements? I'm not. I'm just a human being as disgusted as you are."

"You mean you're going to sit down to it?" "That's a pretty idiotic question! What else can I do?"

"I don't know—Hanged if I do," Nancy hesitated, something like tears coming into her eyes. "It's all so depressing—so disappointing. . . . Yes, why if I fared up, Alvin, I didn't mean it, honestly."

"Yes, you did—and I don't blame you one bit. . . . You said in so many words that as a Met man I ought to do something about it."

"Yes, but. . . . I spoke without thinking. Naturally you can't do anything. Nobody can."

"Why can't they?" Alvin moved to the window, hands in pockets, and stared at the rain. "Then he swung abruptly to look at Nancy again. "Yes, why can't they?" he reprimanded. "Man has always been at the mercy of the weather, and yet he's conquered everything else except one or two virulent diseases. He's mastered the sea, the air, and the land. Yet he puts up with rain, hurricane, and fog, tolerates paralysis of cities because he thinks the climate is something too big to handle. . . . It isn't, you know. Somebody has to master it, one day."

Nancy came forward slowly, surprise in her blue eyes. "Alvin, I never heard you say so much before."

"I've never been so moved before. Control of the climate is a virgin field which no scientist or meteorologist has ever trodden before. . . . Suppose Alvin Brook tried it?"

"You—you mean—"

"I mean," Alvin said, with a grand gesture towards the rain, "subdue this sort of thing! Find a way to supply the weather which is required. It . . . could be . . . done."

"It's a wonderful dream, Alvin, even if it doesn't come true."

"But I will, I swear. You've started off the spark, and I shan't rest now until I've followed the thing through—bring David in and let me make a promise to him. That's one way of being sure that I'll keep it."

Nancy looked doubtful for a moment, but nevertheless she obeyed. In a moment or two she had brought the serious-eyed boy from the kitchen. He looked at his father with undivided irritation.

"You think I told you wrong last night when I said it was going to be fine, don't you, David?" Alvin asked.

David, 10 years old, glanced towards the window, then back to his father.

"It's wet, dad, and you said it was going to be fine."

"I know, I got it wrong through a reason which is too complicated for you to understand. But look, I'm going to make another promise to you, and this time I shall keep it. . . . But the time you are a man you are going to be able to have nice weather whenever you want it. So is everybody else. That's a promise."

"Smashing," the boy said, shrugging, then with an unusual sagacity. "How are you going to do it?" "I'm going to do it by things with machines, things that will make certain nice weather pictures will ever be ruined. . . . Now, give me a smile, son."

So for many weeks—while ironically the weather settled into a fine sunny spell and even allowed the picnic to be had—Alvin kept on churning rainbows, working out mathematics, asking countless questions of his fellow Metmen without giving away too much, and generally plotting and planning until finally he had a thick notebook full of facts. These engaged him on every free night during the autumn, and at Christmas he was still thinking about them. Then, just upon New Year, as he was being dragged to a dance quite against his inclinations, he said:

"I believe I've got it, Nancy!"

"Got what?" She fixed her hair carefully before the dressing table mirror.

"The answer! The control of the climate!"

Alvin sat with one immaculate shoe on and the other off, staring into space.

"You mean you're still wondering about that business?" Nancy looked at him in sheer surprise.

"I thought you'd given it up long ago!"

"Only because I haven't talked about it. I've not given it up—not I! Besides, I promised David."

"I've got all the details of what could be done, but the puzzle was—how? Now I believe I've got that too. . . . Look, would you listen to me for a moment?"

"I always listen, dear, but don't assume that I understand. Fire away. I'm paying attention."

"Heat and cold are actually molecular, you know."

"Molecular? What's that mean?"

"Alvin opened his mouth to explain, then he closed it again. He had suddenly realized—perhaps for the first time—how completely alone he really was with his problem. Nancy just did not understand. She was stupid, but because the antics of the climate were right outside her sphere of interest, except when she felt cold or got wet. On the other hand, the men at the Met office

wouldn't be any help either for Alvin had not told them a thing. His theory was still too much of a theory to merit serious consideration from experts, and besides there was always the chance that he might be suspected of suffering from "overstrain."

"Well?" Nancy repeated. "What's molecular?"

"It's scientific. I don't think, you'd understand it, dear. You see, molecules vibrate faster when they're heated, and slow down when they're cold. At absolute zero—like the cold of outer space—there's no movement at all, whereas at furnace heat they dash all over the place. Never mind. It's no time to talk shop when we're going to a dance."

And on that note Alvin closed up completely, and remained closed up to such an extent that he never mentioned his theory while at home. He nursed it himself and brooded over it in the Met office. Slowly but surely, as winter gave way to spring, he built up his idea into practical form, drawing sketches with the Met office equipment during his dinner hour. The final result, in mid-May, was a drawing of a queer-looking machine which he quietly took to a firm of engineers for construction.

Early June saw his model completed. There seemed something symbolic about the fact that he took it home on an evening of storming rain. Nancy watched curiously as, regardless of the table being laid for a meal, he put the parcel down and removed the brown paper. Then from a stiff cardboard box he brought forth a glinting rectangle two feet square, and looking rather like a camera except that the lens and various gadgets were located on the top instead of the side.

Nancy's wonder deepened. Young David came into the room, stared at the thing, then looked at his father's beaming face.

"What is it, dad? Something for me?"

"Don't always be thinking of yourself, my lad," Alvin returned cryptically. "It's not for you, or me, or your mother. It's for everybody. Or at least it will be in the full time."

"It's something you've got to do with—the weather?" Nancy hesitated. "You've given up that idea, haven't you?" Or at any rate you've never mentioned it recently."

"Only because I knew you wouldn't understand. Yes, this is a model of the first climate machine, and it's demanded a good deal of hard thought and perspiration to produce it."

Nancy did not say anything. She put her arm around David's shoulder and continued to stare at the boxlike contrivance.

"I could explain it to you, but I don't think I will," Alvin said after a moment. "You're no scientist. You'll only get confused results. . . . That being so, suppose I turned the weather around this house—a limited area, you'll understand—in sunny warmth. You'd believe that, wouldn't you?"

Being master in his own home—or so he fondly imagined—he picked up a length of flex which trailed from the contrivance and after adjusting a transforming-pointer, pushed the plug at the end of the flex into the power socket. Nothing happened beyond that the box hummed softly in its inside. Outside, pitiless rain blasted against the windows, and bonedowners in the garden swayed mournfully before a rising gale.

"Well?" Nancy asked, after a few moments. "What's supposed to happen? I don't see anything different."

"You will," Alvin was very placid. "Give it time."

Nancy had little choice. Besides, she was curious. It even seemed as though something ought to happen, whereas in fact nothing would not have been so intense and concentrated.

"What exactly is supposed to happen?" Nancy asked at last, and Alvin turned sharply.

"Everything within an area of half a mile should have fine weather," he said, shrugging. "We're at the centre of the circle, and within half a mile on every side of it, fine weather should be the answer."

"Oh . . . I see."

Nancy did not see at all: she was merely being polite.

"It's clearing!" Alvin exclaimed suddenly, a taut, incredulous note in his voice. "No doubt about it! See up there—a touch of blue sky!"

Nancy moved to the window. Quite unceremoniously, Alvin seized the back of her head and directed her attention upwards. She was forced then to see it—a tiny spatch of blue amid the surrounding gray, and it was growing even as she watched. Wider and wider.

"That spot," Alvin said, "is directly over that machine of mine. The radiation from it is going vertically upwards, and the Meteorological activity is set up which creates a dissolution of the vapors producing the clouds and rain. . . ."

"You are sure," Nancy asked presently, still watching the blueness that the blue sky that comes after a shower? "This rain may only be a shower after all!"

"Shower!" Alvin exploded, scandalized. "I'll show you how you'll get your mac on, both of you. Hurry! We're going for a walk!"

Still with the feeling that she was obeying orders of a lunatic, Nancy hurried out of the room with David beside her. She came back a few moments or two in a plastic mantel and rain hood. Behind her loomed David in raincoat and schoolbag.

"Good," Alvin said absently, and much preoccupied, he led the way out into the hall, slipped on raincoat and hat, and then opened the front door. Outside it had stopped raining even though there were sloppy puddles in the front path.

"Let's go," Alvin said briefly. "Half a mile. I'll show you whether it's a shower or not."

Grimly intent on the outcome of his experiment, Alvin led the way through the suburban avenues, and after a while the sun even got through and beamed down affectionately on the clouds. Then as they reached one of the farther avenues, the sunlight faded and they stepped abruptly into rain—hissing sheets of it.

"Good," Alvin said. "This is the limit of influence. Now look above you."

Nancy and David did so, their eyes screwed up against the rain. Over the avenues where they had come was blue sky, the houses gleaming in diagonal sunlight. Yet above them was writhing gray cloud, viciously obscuring the blue. It was a classic example of *Then Tar* and no farther shalt thou go!

"Well!" Alvin asked triumphantly, rain pouring down his face. "I've proved it was no passing shower. The rain stops, and the cloud vanishes, at the edge of influence from my machine. Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied—and wet," Nancy said. "It's soaking into my shoes. For heaven's sake, let's get back."

They took a stride forward, and the queer sunlight shafted down on them. Behind the rain was like a curtain.

"This is marvellous!" Alvin enthused, as they returned home through sunlit streets. "The proofs of moments of thought! You grasp why the sun is questioned so hesitantly."

"I do," David said, surprisingly, glancing above. "It's just clear of the clouds. If it were a bit lower there'd have been no sun."

"Right," Alvin approved. "Very good, my lad. What else do you know?"

"Only that that box of yours does something to stop rain and clouds having any effect. It's a wizard idea, whatever it is."

"It's an idea that's going to change the world, my boy," Alvin said, speaking a great truth without realizing it. "You and your mother have just witnessed the first practical demonstration of weather control."

By this time they had come back to the house in the brilliant sunlight. Loosening his raincoat, Alvin strode through to the lounge and switched his machine off. The instant he did so there was a blinding flash of lightning outside and a simultaneous clap of thunder. The house shuddered to its foundations.

White-faced, Nancy hung on to the doorknob looking into the room. More curious than frightened, David stood beside her, then he pointed through the window.

"Look! It's raining again! As bad as ever."

"Exactly," Alvin nodded. "The normal condition of the weather at the moment, now I've withdrawn the influence of my machine. That clap of thunder was caused by the 'pushed back' conditions abruptly coming into position again. . . ."

rather like the forcing back of the atmosphere for a millionth of a second by a lightning flash. Or breaking the sound barrier. . . . Bound to be a reaction."

"Any more more thunderclaps coming?" Nancy asked nervously, as Alvin unplugged his device from the power socket.

"No, no. Everything's quite normal now." There was a silence, rather one of incredulity, as Nancy, in behalf of her outdoor things and set to work to bring order to the chaotic table. Alvin, meanwhile, took a seat by the window and gave himself up to thought.

"Nancy, I've come to a turning point in my career. Tomorrow I'm about bigger game than being an official at the Met office. I'm going to try to interest Big Money in the idea of weather control."

"You mean—give up your job?" Nancy looked justifiably anxious.

"Not that wouldn't do. I've got a few days' holiday due, so I'll cash in on them. Either tomorrow or the next day I'll take a bit of time off work and get busy. This discovery's enormous—algebraic. There's no limit to what it can do. But, of course, I'll need high finance to back me."

"Yes, of course." And because she knew Alvin was the world's worst businessman, the anxious look did not leave her face. "Don't let them cheat you out of anything, will you? That's a very careless idea you've got there, and in the hands of worldly financiers you might. . . ."

"I shan't," Alvin interrupted flatly. "I know what I'm doing, and I'll drive a tough bargain to get the backing I want."

CHAPTER II

TO his annoyance, Alvin had to work the following day—his holiday of four days beginning the day afterwards.

To Alvin, with so much locked up inside him, the day at the Met office seemed interminable. When at last it came to an end he made for home as quickly as possible, and spent the evening collecting data, notes, and data, regarding his weather machine for presentation to the right party on the morrow.

"Whom are you going to approach?" Nancy questioned.

"I'm not sure yet. There are three likely financiers who might be interested—Nicholas Sutherland, Sir Robert Bentley or Marcus Denham. They are all pretty broad-minded in their approach to something new, and I do know that Marcus Denham is something of a scientist as well. . . . Have to see."

Of the three prospective financiers, Alvin chose Nicholas Sutherland first when he started off next day, his "weather box" inside a big suitcase. As usual it was raining, that drizzly sort of stuff that soaks through and through. Protected by his small car, Alvin was, for once, not complaining at the weather. It was just what he needed for a demonstration.

Toward 10.30 he reached the Sutherland Oil Corp. headquarters, vast edifices of granite and chromium signs in the heart of the city. Almost immediately a braided commissaire loomed and inquired briefly of his business.

"Sutherland in person," Alvin explained cheerfully. "I must have an interview with him."

"You have an appointment?"

"Well, no. My name's Alvin Brook, and my concern is oil. I represent a Texan firm. . . . I'm sure Mr. Sutherland will see me."

The commissaire looked as though he doubted it, but nevertheless he departed majestically to regions unknown and left Alvin with his fingers crossed. . . . Evidently to some purpose, for after a while the commissaire came back, gravely polite.

"Mr. Sutherland has a few moments, sir, if you will stop this way."

Alvin obeyed. He was conducted through opulent corridors, into fast elevators, through softly lighted ante-rooms, and at last into the office of Nicholas Sutherland himself, a small, birdlike man with a gleam of childish smoothness and a manner of genial conciseness.

"Mr. Sutherland," Alvin smiled, shaking hands. "Forgive me taking up your time."

"Not at all—glad to meet anybody connected with the oil business," Mr. Brook, who did not wish to see me about."

"Well, it's nothing to do with oil," Alvin said frankly. "That was an excuse to get into your presence. I knew you'd probably be suddenly busy if I explained my real purpose."

"Ingenuity is always to be commended, Mr. Brook. What is your real purpose?"

"Control of the weather."

Sutherland was too old a hand to give a start. Instead he took a deep drag at his cigarette and then smiled at a cherub.

"The weather, eh? Well, that's original, anyhow—even if I don't see any connection between it and oil."

"You're, sir, a financier," Alvin hurried on. "I might even say you're one of the richest men in the country. I also know you have backed many projects in your time. I'm looking for a backer now. Complete control of the climate, anywhere in the world, at the touch of a button."

"How very intriguing."

"In ten minutes I can give you fine weather for half a mile around in a circle, this building being the centre."

Sutherland seemed about to say something when the telephone buzzed. He picked it up, kept his eyes away from Alvin, and made a lot of meaningless comments. Finally he put the phone down and rose to his feet. The smile of a cherub was back again.

"I am, I'm sorry, Mr. Brook, but my presence is requested elsewhere in the building at the moment. Some other time, eh? You've quite intrigued me. Really."

"Any time," Alvin said, eagerly. "How about tomorrow?"

"Mmm—uncertain." Sutherland was moving vaguely toward the door. "How about leaving your address, then I'll fix a date. I'm a very busy man, as of course, you realize."

Alvin fumbled in his pocket and pulled out his wallet. From it he extracted a card and handed it over.

"There you are, Mr. Sutherland. I'm entirely at your disposal."

"Splendid—splendid." Sutherland shook hands, beamed, and opened the door. Alvin picked up his equipment, and went into the corridor humming perfectly well that he had seen the last of Nicholas Sutherland. Probably the telephone gap was rigged anyway to get him away from unwanted callers.

"All right," Alvin muttered directly as he stepped out into the clinging drizzle. "All right! There are others, thank goodness, and some day Mr. Bigshot Sutherland, you'll realize what you've missed."

Disappointed, Alvin did not mean to respond. Alvin set off again—and in half an hour he was invading the headquarters of Sir Robert Bentley. Here he drew a complete blank. The great man was away, out of the country. Just nothing could be done. Muttering to himself, Alvin departed, had a quick lunch, and then invaded the third member on his list—Marcus Denham.

Marcus Denham granted an interview, and toward 2.30 Alvin was shown into his office. Denham, immaculate and hefty, rose from his desk and came across the room as Alvin entered. He shook hands with a great warm paw and beamed from a fleshy, usually florid face.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Brook," he greeted. "Something about engineering, didn't you say?"

"Well, yes," Alvin said, as he was waved to a chair. "But it's not entirely true. My basic idea is engineering, in which your firm is interested, but I've a deeper purpose."

"All right, let's have it," Denham sat down again, and pushed his chair back a little. He looked at Alvin and looked at him with curiously small blue eyes over the fragrant smoke.

"It's about the weather," Alvin said, as calmly as he could.

"Oh? What about it?"

"In this box here," Alvin said, pointing to it on the carpet, "I have the means to control it, in model form, that is. . . . As you'll agree, that is a form of engineering."

"Any science," Denham added, speculative thought making his blue eyes. "Keep right on talking. Sounds good."

Definitely encouraged, Alvin continued: "I have the means of control, and I can demonstrate right at this moment. I believe you are something of a scientist yourself!"

"I have degrees for it," Denham admitted. "You must be one yourself to have thought of such a thing."

"Not exactly. I'm a Met man, with a definite

grivance against the English climate. It occurred to me how many things could benefit from control of the weather—not only in England, but anywhere in the world—"

Densham got to his feet and the ash sprayed down his ample waistcoat.

"Show me!" he ordered abruptly. "You say you can do a small demonstration on the spot—All right, let's see what you can do with a foul day like this."

Alvin nodded and quietly went to work, watched all the time by the interested magnate. The model was plugged into a power socket, switched on, and then came the period of waiting. Densham drew back on his chair as he peered out of the window, then at length he gazed startled the weed out of his mouth as he nearly upwards.

"By all the saints, I do believe you're right!" he ejaculated. "There's blue sky coming into view."

"Of course," Alvin said, waiting.

Like a man watching a miracle, Densham remained by the window, his smouldering cigar in his fingers. Then at last twilight shifted down and set the raindrops on the glass scintillating with all the colors of the spectrum.

"It's as easy as that," Alvin said, coming to the financier's side. "First day—wet day—at the touch of a button. . . . But, of course, to put it on a proper basis it needs money—oceans of it, and I just haven't got it."

"But you've got ideas, man! Marvelous ideas! And the world is always willing to pay for them. In this case, I'm the one who'll pay for them. We're going to talk business, Mr. Brook. Switch off the fine weather and let's get down to facts."

Alvin touched the blue sky coming into view. There was a lapse of a few seconds and then the customary flash of lightning and reverberating thunder.

"What's that?" Densham asked, frowning, as the drizzle returned.

"Just the normal air pressure resuming its position. Nothing to be alarmed about."

"I'm not alarmed. I'm just wondering about something. Suppose you had all the world under climatic control and then suddenly stopped all of it with a master switch. What would happen?"

Alvin reflected for a moment. "I've never pondered on it, simply because I don't possess any responsible scientist, in charge of weather machines, would do such an idiotic thing. . . . It comes to the result of simultaneously stopping the world over would be disastrous. All the natural air currents would suddenly swing into being, impelled as ever by the revolution of the earth."

"Mmm, worth thinking about," Densham mused, sitting at the desk. "However, to meet practical matters. . . . I suppose you've got blueprints and specifications of this invention? Something for engineers to work on?"

"Decidedly. They're in my car. I didn't bring them until I felt I was on safe ground. There are stacks of them."

Densham grinned. "Wise man. All right, I'll put my cards on the table. You've shown me something practical, and I'm scientist enough to know that what you've said is quite logical. To that you have added your demonstration. I'm willing to back you to the hilt. I'll pay you half a million."

Alvin was silent but his thoughts were hurrying. Densham waited, picked a cigar out of the silver box, and sniffed at it.

"Hearing everything is fine," Alvin said at length. "I'd say it's worth a million of anybody's money. The oil companies paid that clear of tax to a man who invented a perfect substitute for petrol, and this is even bigger than that. On the other hand, I realize that they have heavy expense in the building of machines the world over—so split the difference and say three-quarters of a million."

"I am prepared to accept your offer," the tycoon said slowly, giving the impression he had weighed everything beforehand. "Seven hundred and fifty thousand it is."

"All the facts are here in my briefcase—"

"No doubt, but before that, answer me one or two questions. First, does anybody else know the details of this invention?"

Alvin shook his head.

"Have you a wife and family? If so, how much do they know?"

"I have a wife and a young son. My wife doesn't have the least idea of what I'm driving at

—and, of course, my son hasn't at his age."

"Good. And there's nobody else?"

"Nobody." Alvin frowned slightly. "Does it matter, anyway?"

"Of course it does. I am buying the exclusive right to your discovery. I don't want to know if anybody else has . . . nibbled." Densham grinned suddenly. "All right, I'm satisfied. Now to business. Naturally I cannot part with that kind of money without being absolutely sure of what I'm doing."

"I want time to look over the details of your design and specifications. I am prepared to give you a signed agreement as a receipt. Even a post-dated cheque for £1,000, payable in three days—when I am approximately the time I will take me to sort everything out. Are you agreeable?"

Alvin sniffed around mentally for snags, but failed to detect any. He nodded slowly.

"All right, it's a deal, but on my side I want a proviso that you will have your decision ready in three days. I don't want indefinite delays. I want action."

"You'll get it," Densham promised, and snapped the button on the intercom. "Miss Cateby? Come here a moment and bring your notebook. I want an agreement drafted. . . ."

* * *

Alvin left the Densham office with an agreement duly signed and a cheque for £1,000 payable in three days' time. He felt entirely satisfied with himself and pleased with his business acumen. Even the perpetual drizzle could not damp his spirits, and once he got home Nancy listened intently to all he had to say. At first her excited joy knew no bounds, then something of her feminine instinct started to slow down her exultation.

"And Densham now has everything to study? The model included?" she asked, when Alvin stopped talking.

"Certainly. I just said so."

"Mmm. . . . Nancy lacked thoughtful. Young David was not eating, not particularly interested in developments, anyway."

"What's the matter?" Alvin asked presently; and Nancy gave a start.

"Oh, nothing really. I just don't like the thought of your notes and specifications being in Densham's hands. And the model, too. It comes to that. All you've got is £1,000, and an agreement. You can't even cash the cheque for less than £100."

"Well, what's wrong with that? I can't expect Densham to pay up without knowing what he's getting. My demonstration wasn't enough in itself; he wants to know what makes things tick. So would I in his position. I'll be all right, don't you worry."

And, manlike, with his head definitely in and above the clouds, Alvin did not worry any further. Drizzle or otherwise, he was enjoying his holiday, with the result that Nancy and David found themselves whirled through the soggy countryside for an evening's run, ending up at a remote motel where a noisy couple could have enjoyed it thoroughly if only she had not had a nagging doubt at the back of her mind.

Though Nancy said nothing to Alvin at breakfast, her thinking concerning her doubt, her very quietness was something that puzzled Alvin quite a lot. With £750,000 in the offing, he just could not understand what had occasioned an attack of the doubts, and he had no chance to inquire for, just as breakfast was starting, the telephone rang.

"Yes! Alvin Brook speaking—"

"Oh, hello, Mr. Brook! It was the unmistakable voice of Marcus Densham, of husky good humor. "Glad I caught you before you got off for the day—Look, I had an unexpected opportunity to examine those plans and specifications of yours."

"Good. And what do you think of them?"

"They're everything you claim, and I'm not relying on my own judgment when I say that, dear. I had my scientific staff check as well. . . ."

To Alvin's amazement, Mr. Brook, I'm so sorry you can't be at my office this morning to complete our business?"

Alvin smiled into the mouthpiece. "I'll be there. What time shall I be?"

"Say around 10. I'm phoning from home, of course." There was a brief pause, then: "Tell you a better idea. I have to pass your address on the way to the office. I'll have the car call on you. You'll get in easier with me by your side, eh?"

"Into the Densham building, you mean?" Alvin gave a laugh. "Yes, it's always a good idea to ride with the boss."

"Right. I'll pick you up—9.30 prompt. Be punctual."

"For three-quarters of a million, what do you think?" Alvin chuckled, and then he rang off. He became aware of Nancy watching him from the lounge door.

"Marcus Densham, I presume?" she asked.

"Yes, my love—and we're in the money!" Alvin strode forward and swept her up into his arms. "Densham has checked the blueprints and specifications and that three-quarters of a million is only a formality."

For the moment Nancy forgot all her anxieties and kissed her husband ardently as he held her. "He's coming at 9.30 to pick me up," he said. "I'd better give myself an extra polish up."

Right on time, Marcus Densham arrived in the biggest car ever seen in Alvin's quiet little avenue. The financier did not come into the house; he merely instructed his chauffeur to blow the horn, which was sufficient to bring the ready-and-waiting Alvin into view, his wife beside him. Only then did Densham lower the window of the car and peer outside, his floor-plate wreathed in somehow unconvincing smiles.

"Ready, Mr. Brook?" he inquired.

"Ready—and willing," Alvin came down the pathway, holding on to his wife's arm. "Meet my wife, Mr. Densham. Nancy, this is Mr. Densham himself."

Nancy smiled rather uncomfortably as a gray-suited arm reached through the car window and an enormous hand gripped her extra polish up."

"So you're Mr. Brook's little lady! Delighted! Take good care of him, Mrs. Brook. With ideas like he can turn out he ought to be kept in cotton wool."

Nancy laughed, hardly knowing what she ought to say. Densham's personality somehow overpowered her. She turned to Alvin and kissed him as he looked back at her from the car door.

"By-by, dearest—for the moment."

Densham cleared his throat and waited, his broad smile never relaxing. Then at last Alvin was firmly seated in the back of the car, and the car and sank down in the soft cushions—but he still waved vigorously through the car's rear window as it glided out of the avenue into the main road.

"You say your wife doesn't understand anything about this invention of yours?" Densham asked presently, as they sped into the heart of the city.

"Nothing at all. She isn't scientific."

"But surely she's got some idea of what you're doing? She must know, I take it, that you can control the weather?"

"Oh, yes, she knows. But she doesn't know how I do it, and I think that's the rarest very much either, just so long as it is it."

Densham entered his office at 9.45, with Alvin beside him. What happened in the office only those two men knew. The odd thing was that Alvin never said a word. He sat there, smiling, and Densham went on with his work, dealing with various members of his staff as the day progressed, and not one of them saw any trace of Alvin Brook.

It was toward 3.30 in the afternoon when Densham's phone rang on the main wire. He lifted it, writing on his scratch pad at the same time.

"Yes! Densham speaking . . ."

"Hello, Mr. Densham. This is Nancy Brook speaking—Alvin's wife."

"Oh, yes! How are you?" Densham reached out to a switch and pushed it down. That meant the line was exclusive between himself and Nancy Brook.

"I'm getting a bit worried, Mr. Densham. Alvin hasn't come home yet, and naturally with so much at stake I'm a bit excited—maybe unduly so. Is he still with you?"

"As a matter of fact, he is. We were just deciding to have a small celebration, and it occurred to me that there's no reason why you shouldn't be in it, too—as Alvin's wife."

"I'd love to, Mr. Densham."

"Good. Then come over here as soon as you can. I'll tell the commissionaire you're coming, so you won't have any difficulty when you arrive. You can do that?"

"Certainly I can. I'll tell my sister to have an eye to David, then I'll be along."

"Your sister?" Denham repeated, vaguely.

"Yes. She only lives a few doors away. She looks after David when I have to go out. David's our son, you know."

"Of course, of course. How silly of me. All right, Mrs. Brook, come at once to my car."

Denham put the telephone back on its cradle and reflected for a moment, then he snipped the intercom button.

"Yes, Mr. Denham?" came the voice of the commissioner in the entrance hall.

"In a short while a Mrs. Brook will be coming, George. She's a young, rather pretty woman. Show her straight up to my office."

"Very good, Mr. Denham."

Nancy was shown in to him half an hour later.

"Ah, Mrs. Brook, do come in," Denham got to his feet and grasped her right hand in both of his.

"So nice to see you again. Have a seat."

Nancy sat down slowly. She knew, she could feel, that there was something wrong somewhere.

"Where's Alvin?" she asked presently.

"I rather thought he would have been here."

"Alvin? Yes, he's here," Denham's smile faded as he stood with his hands behind him, a hard look creeping into his florid face. "He'll always be here."

"Always?" A startled look came into Nancy's eyes. "How do you mean? What do you mean? You said—"

Denham reflected for a moment, his eyes on Nancy's distraught face. Then he shrugged to himself and pressed a button. Instantly one of the panels on the wall shot back, revealing a black space beyond.

"He's in there," Denham said, indicating the aperture. "Look for yourself."

Hardly daring to think what he was going to see, drawn by fascination at the opening, Nancy moved forward. The nearer she came to the big aperture the stronger became a warm wind blowing about her. It disturbed her hair, set her skirt flapping. There was a distinctly strong draught blowing from somewhere below.

"Where?" she began, turning—and she was just in time to see Denham's great hands thrusting toward her. They struck her violently in the chest, toppling her backward. Helplessly she slipped over the edge of the aperture and went down into blackness, a gasping scream wrenched from her lips.

Perpetration wet on his face, Denham turned back to his desk and snipped the panel switch. The panel closed and became an undisturbable part of the wall. Alvin Brook had gone, so had his wife, into the wide space between the party walls of Denham's office and the general office.

Denham's office on the ignored floor was 1,000 feet above the foundations of the edifice.

CHAPTER III

HALF an hour after Nancy Brook had plunged into the 1,000-foot shaft between the party wall and a small, austere room with glass as pale and keen as a snail's case came into Denham's office. He moved with a preciseness which gave a hint as to his calling—Big time lawyer Robert Carlow, and an ably able crooked legal man as ever practised behind a brass plate.

"Well, what this time?" Carlow asked, sitting at the desk with easy familiarity. "Sounded pretty urgent, to judge from your voice on the phone."

"It is," Denham was quite composed as he pushed across the cigar box. "I've just paid a very high price for a very valuable secret."

"Why should you want me for that?" Carlow lighted a cigar and watched the smoke curl upwards. "What price have you paid?"

"Murder," Denham explained simply, and that made the lawyer start ever so slightly. "I've killed a man and his wife because they were a source of danger. Where they were, I don't know, but I can guarantee they'll never be found."

"Then what are you worrying about? No bodies—no murder charge. That's obvious."

"They were seen to come here. I want you to keep me clear."

"Might I ask what prompted you to murder? It must have been something exceptionally attractive."

"It was. Nothing less—fire of control of the climate—the perfect sure-fire way of doing it, given enough capital. And I certainly have that. Maybe your kid-schooled legal brain can't see it, but the man who controls the weather dictates his own terms."

"With you controlling it I can well believe it," Carlow murmured, getting to his feet. "And you had to commit murder to get the secret? Well, I suppose you know your own business best, and of course I do not. I can't see you, you know, but I don't do just what you say." Denham snapped. "Get the police off my track at the earliest moment!"

"I'll try. The police have a habit—and also the right of snooping incessantly when bodies disappear. As long as those bodies are never found you're comparatively safe. The only other snag might be if anybody else knows this weather secret. But that's matters. Brook's wife was the only one, and she certainly can't talk now. Brook didn't mention his discovery to anybody else. I made certain on that point."

The lawyer departed. Denham looked grimly at the closed door for a moment, then he resumed his seat at the desk. After a moment he switched on the intercom.

"Yes, Mr. Denham?"

"Send Mr. Richards in to me right away."

Denham switched off and waited, chewing at his cigar. Then Richards, chief scientist of the Denham organization, came in—a tall, keen, entirely resourceful individual.

"I'm not going to waste time," Denham said, indicating a chair. "I want you to work out in the minutes you've got to establish a chain of weather stations around the globe. I want to know how much machinery we'll need, how much labor, and how long it will take. I've got the go-ahead now, and everything is up to me."

"It's going to cost several million," Richards said. "I can tell you that before I even work out the details. And how about the various permits from different governments?"

"Do not worry about their countries, you mean? Leave that to me. I'll fix it somehow."

"Very well. I've got the various charts and specifications in my office and I'll get to work immediately. The scientist's refusal for a moment."

"Might I ask a question, sir?"

"Well?"

"What do you get out of this weather-control idea? Surely something more than a sunny day for the millions you'll have to spend. Where does the profit come in?"

"I'm surprised that isn't obvious," Denham grinned. "I intend to put myself in a position where every country on earth will have to pay me certain dues in order to have the weather they desire."

"Suppose one country doesn't agree to your terms? What's to stop them pulling down the weather machine which is in their particular country?"

"Nothing," Denham admitted, "but the consequences to them might be disastrous. A cyclone perhaps, a deluge—The weather is an almighty powerful weapon when you have the mastery of it. I don't think any man has possessed such unlimited power as I am going to get. From the first moment I saw the possibilities."

"You're a scientist, Mr. Denham. He could see clearly enough where everything was leading, but if he wanted to keep his well-paid job it was not politic to make comment. Instead he got to his feet.

"He'll be all then, sir? Shall I work out those estimates you want?"

"Yes—as quickly as you can, and I hope I don't have to remind you that everything is in the strictest confidence."

Richards nodded and went out. Smiling to himself, Denham drew at his cigar and thought through the window. The endless possibilities of the idea Alvin Brook had developed into a practicality were only just commencing to dawn upon him.

* * *

Naturally, as scientist Richards worked steadily on the estimates for the weather stations, there was considerable trouble brewing over the disclosure of Alvin Brook and his wife. First, her sister reported to the police that she had not returned home; and on the other hand, after her short-bellied was up, the Alvin office wanted to know what had become of Alvin Brook.

From the ordinary local police, the matter passed to Scotland Yard, and to one of the best inspectors in the force.

After a fortnight of investigation, the inspector was compelled to put the business in the "Cases Uncompleted" file and wait for the one chance

that might give him the opportunity to start ferreting again.

So, in radio, television and newspapers the "disappearance" of Alvin Brook and his wife, and the possible existence of a weather secret, were a topic (therein, began to have less weight—and finally went out of fashion altogether. Only then did Marcus Denham breathe again and start to lay his plans on the estimates which scientist Richards had submitted.

The first move was a general publicity campaign, in radio, newspapers and television. Not a very difficult task since Denham himself owned the principal publishing and advertising organizations in the radio, television or newspaper authority concerned. . . . From out of this there came the general report that the public would welcome weather study-made, on which they could always rely. This, of course, applied to England and the West European countries, always the most maligned when it came to climatic vagary.

Two people were particularly concerned over this weather-control idea—people seeing millions who merely regarded it as a publicity stunt. The two people were Dora Lester, sister of Nancy Brook, who had now adopted young David and was bringing him up with her own family—and the other person was Nicholas Sutherland, the oil magnate. Dora Lester, for her part, knew that weather control had been Alvin's invention—Nancy had hinted as much—and of course, Sutherland knew he had turned down such a suggestion as impractical. Both of them also knew that Alvin and his wife had disappeared. How then had Marcus Denham got hold of the idea of weather control?

For Dora Lester there was merely the infuriating realization that she could do nothing about it. Since the law could not prove anything, what chance did she have? Sutherland, however, was a man of power and influence, and he hinted Marcus Denham like poison. Further, he was annoyed with himself that he had slipped up in not having suspected the invention. Sutherland knew Denham had got hold of it, and there was a breath of criminal work behind the scenes, too. Sutherland was prepared to wait and start moving when the time came.

Meanwhile, Denham forged ahead, quite satisfied that nobody of importance knew that the idea of weather control was not his own. If he had known that Nicholas Sutherland had had first refusal he would probably have not been so complacent.

Having satisfied himself that the public in general took kindly to the idea of weather control, Denham moved into the second phase of his plan. He contacted the various governments, whose countries would be needed in the general climatic plan, and flew to interview these VIPs. Then he called together a special meeting of certain experts in the scientific and engineering fields headed by Richards. Before them he laid the facts.

"Gentlemen," he said, at the head of the long, polished table, "we are entering upon an era unknown in the history of the world, and I seek your approval for a foundation for a new corporation. . . . All of you will know, from our various radio, television and newspaper concerns that I have been hammering the idea of weather control to the general public for some time past. Now it has come to the point where, willing only for your blessing, it has become an established fact."

The men nodded among themselves but said nothing, as Denham had captured their interest, Denham proceeded:

"As Mr. Richards here will verify, the establishment of weather control relies upon many weather machines all working in perfect union. Between them they have to maintain the balance in the general atmospheric conditions, otherwise the outcome would be disastrous. Let one machine get ahead or behind the others in its functions and the various 'natural' pressures, as it were, could then, would come crowding in with unpredictable results. That has all been worked out in the master blueprint. My main concern is the profit we shall make with these stations."

"Which I imagine has been well taken care of," one of the men commented.

"Naturally. Only a fool does anything which

is not for personal profit. The weather machines will have to be located in various countries, countries which in themselves are quite satisfied with the weather they get, but must, nevertheless, have a machine so that it can contribute its own share to the whole chain of machines. To a long story, short, gentlemen, I have made arrangements—have, in fact, got signed agreements—for machines to be erected in several countries. In all, there will be seven machines, with the master machine situated in London here. The total cost of the machines alone will be in the neighborhood of £10,000,000, without the labor involved in manufacturing, erecting and maintaining them. There was a silence. Then gloomily the men around the table—those who represented finance at least—looked at each other. The scientists and engineers remained impersonal and obviously impatient.

"The Denham Corp. will find the money," Denham said. "That is, with your approval."

"I am not so sure that we can give that," remarked Williams of "Steel," and one of the most influential men on the board of the Denham Corp. "Ten million is an enormous amount of money to fritter away on what may only be a dream."

"Dream!" Denham echoed. "Richard! Richard! I and I have worked on this for absolute fact, and I don't have to remind you, do I, that we are experienced scientists?"

"No, but . . . Why such expense? Why can't the countries in turn pay for the machines, which have to be in their countries? They'll derive benefit, won't they?"

"In most cases, yes. Here and there, as I have said, there are certain countries who don't want any change, but are nevertheless agreeable to a machine being erected to complete the chain. . . . Getting back to the financial aspect, gentlemen. If we pay the whole price of the installation, we are not beholden to anybody. That is, we can make any part that works will become clear when I explain our tariff."

"Tariff?" Williams of "Steel" gave a start. "What sort of tariff?"

"The scale of charges for any particular weather in any particular country at any particular time. According to what particular kind of weather is required, so will the charge be adjusted. It will, of course, demand greater resources on our part to produce any, say, a cold storm, than it will to produce a prolonged spell of sunny weather. All corporations have their tariff, for electrical energy and so forth, and so, of course, shall we."

"What assurance can you give that the dues will be paid, or that some particular country will not wreck the machine within its borders if the weather required does not materialize. Such a thing could happen," commented Williams of "Steel."

"It could," Denham agreed, and then he smiled grimly. "But there's a particularly good reason why it wouldn't. What do power companies do if their bills are not paid?"

"Cut off the power, of course."

"Exactly. We shan't do that, but we will prevent weather control from operating over that particular area. That will mean that the atmospheric pressure, being cut back from that particular region by the influence of our machine, will suddenly assert themselves over the region which has not paid. I don't quite know what the result would be, but according to my calculations, and Richards', devastation will be produced. The country concerned would lie in ruins. There can be no two ways about this business, gentlemen. Those involved must pay up, or be destroyed."

"I still won't work," Williams said. "It's dictatorship, by way of weather! I never heard anything like it."

"You mean you never heard anything so imaginative, so vast in its scope," Denham retorted. "I still say it is dictatorship, with flood and disaster if our terms are not accepted. You can't hold a gun at the head of the public like that at least not with my conviction. I'm pulling out, but this thing gets out of hand!"

And Williams did just that. He picked up his briefcase and left the board room without another word. For a moment the others looked uncertain; but Denham came back into the fray with his usual assurance.

"Evidently our good friend fails to appreciate the powerful position in which we intend to place ourselves," he remarked. "However, there may be others of like mind. If so, let's weed them out."

Then Denham started something which resulted after explosive argument in the retirement of two more board members. After that things settled down again, even if the conference did take nearly five grueling hours to complete itself. And in the end Denham won—at the required sanction to go ahead with his schemes.

CHAPTER IV

THROUGHOUT the months which followed, from early summer to winter and through to summer again, and a dull and dismal June, Richards, in charge of operations, acquainted himself magnificently. Always a good scientist and engineer, he rose to new heights with the entire end of constructing the weather machines being placed upon him.

Not far from the Denham Engineering organization in London there gradually grew an enormous ultramodern building of skyscraper proportions. In the early stages a gigantic building named the edifice of steel and concrete, and it was a sign which in late June became transferred to a gigantic neon sign on top of the building itself. It gave Denham a warm glow of pleasure when he surveyed it. In the ground floor, the basement, and the upper floors were the controls, maps, and everything necessary to make contact with the subsidiary stations scattered all over the world, while the top region contained all his officers and executive departments. The only people who looked on this masterpiece with some misgivings were the meteorologists themselves. What exactly was going to happen to them when weather forecasting was no longer necessary?

From June to September, although the machines were completed and ready for action, there was still a lot of detail to be worked out on the clerical side. Tariffs had to be fixed and agreed upon, and particular types of weather wanted by any one country had to be booked and adhered to—for one year ahead—in England an act of Parliament had to be passed legalizing weather control, after which the details had to be worked out for the type of weather required. Those most representative were the Farmers' Union, and the Hotel and Boarding House associations, both of whom were the direct victims of any bad weather which, normally, it ought to be fine.

Out of all this mass of detail Denham and his board finally decided—for a year ahead—to produce a mild autumn, to be changed on Dec. 1 to cold weather, with increases in the snowfall, terminating on Christmas Day with a snowfall, just to be traditional. From Boxing Day to New Year a mild spell was agreed upon, and from Jan. 1 to March 21 cold, dry weather was to prevail. . . . Wet conditions would exist until April 5, then would come a slow transition to correct summer. Any blizzards, cloudbursts, severe frosts, or other vagaries simply would not happen. Such was the program for the British Isles, only one unit in the world-wide pool of requirements, all of which were worked out in detail until at last the great plan was ready.

On Dec. 22, ready to launch the scheme he had so carefully stolen from Alvin Brooks, Denham went to the microphones and television cameras to make his preliminary announcement—and most of the world listened to him, or the interpretation of his words into the appropriate language.

Nicholas Sutherland was one of the millions who watched Denham's placid face on the television screen. He smoked his cigar and listened to what the tycoon had to say, while the back of his head and his thoughts were crawling through channels which would one day find sudden and unexpected action.

"Today we are facing a new era in the history of civilization," Denham said in a somewhat grandiloquently. "An era as important as radio, television, rocket flight, nuclear energy, and all the marvels that go to make up the background of our lives. We are about to find forces hitherto perpetually at the mercy of the weather, which—on balance—form more our enemy than our friend. From the Arctic Circle to the Equator we have the weather on a leash, and in numerous or two thousand miles, light, and even afterwards be held. Today marks the end of disaster by weather, the end of floods, hurricanes, and violent storms. Because this last physical enemy has been tamed, ships will no longer face the tempests, farming lands will no longer be

unproductive, and the average man and woman will no longer find their summer holidays ruined by unexpected downfalls of moisture. Parliament is shortly to issue a calendar of weather, stating what type of weather will apply at particular times of the year. . . . The weather will be calmly and easily produced in every country in the world. . . .

"We do not expect everybody will be happy about weather control," Denham proceeded, with somewhat doubtful modesty. "There will be one or two who will curse it. Certain bodies will arise and say we have no right to tamper—to which I can only say that man has tampered with everything since he was born. Certain bodies will, even, will become extinct through Climate Incorporated, and will have to be absorbed into new fields. That is inevitable—as inevitable as the chaos which resulted among man's machines when the picture first came out. But that as it may, weather control is here, and will remain. My duty is to start the main London-control, and simultaneously every subsidiary station in the world will start action. For two days there may be disturbance, then the balance will settle and you will see for yourselves the benefit which will be derived."

Denham turned from the cameras and the screens gave a long view of him stepping down from the specially constructed rostrum in the London-control powerhouse from which he had been speaking. He began moving towards a wilderness of apparatus, dominated by dials, switches and world-charts. Around him, white-coated technicians waited in respectful and somewhat self-conscious array.

"The Denham said, as the cameras tracked in to isolate him, 'is the switch which will bring weather control into being. I shall coast six, and then plunge it into position.'"

His massive palm clamped around a red-handled switch and he began to cock steadily. The cameras moved in yet again to pick up the lever and hand, fully transmitted in color.

"By—by—by six—"

Denham closed the switch. There was an outburst of sparks, and that was all—or nearly all. The microphones picked up a bass humming as the various machines in the great powerhouse started into action.

And to various parts of the world, moving with the speed of light, flashed invisible energy which started the subsidiary machines. Technicians watched the instruments with blinking eyes; muscular hands grasped vital switches.

Everywhere, from the freezing cold of the Arctic to the soft warmth of the Pacific ocean, the machines sprang into life. They gathered power, transmitting their invisible influence to the atmosphere, bringing about the dream which man has cherished for ages unfulfilled—control of the weather.

CHAPTER V

DENHAM had said two days of disturbance, and he had not exaggerated. For two days the people of the world wondered what was happening. The darkness of midnight descended over the blazing regions of the Sahara Desert, and the sun refused to rise. In the Arctic Circle, while deluging rain of a violence never before known descended on Italy. In the British Isles a gale arose and fast became a hurricane, and the mountains were lifted into the air, lifting traffic high in the screaming air and then bringing it down again. While in New Zealand there was an utter dead calm. In Australia there was a tremendous storm which, in any volcanic eruption, and in the United States the land was literally buried under an avalanche of hail-stones.

Then gradually the freak conditions began to adjust themselves. Radio reported the weather back to London-control from all over the world—and as the man-made currents began to affect the atmospheric drifts the story was one of "according to plan." Each country was settling into the kind of weather for which it had asked. Over the British Isles, as the third day came, there spread a gentle mildness with a soft southerly wind. Overland, as numerous or two thousand miles, light, and even afterwards be held. Today marks the end of disaster by weather, the end of floods, hurricanes, and violent storms. Because this last physical enemy has been tamed, ships will no longer face the tempests, farming lands will no longer be

Be that as it may, the conditions remained.

Day followed day, and every one was soft and warm and sunny, with the same gentle breeze blowing directly on the governed path from the distant shores of the Mediterranean. Those people who could take time off from work, indulged again in holiday, to make up for the disappointments they had received during the "summer." And, of course, this second vacation was a perfect success. One could not go wrong. No rain, no unpleasant cold, calm days and pleasant nights.

Everywhere it was the same. Every country was getting the weather it had ordered. Seven machines kept at bay the natural currents of the atmosphere, directing them to the climates according to the requirements of the country over which they would normally pass.

In Britain there were already signs of commercial revival, apparent in mid-October, with the weather conditions exactly the same as they had been in September. The first people to complain—even as Denham had foreseen—were the meteorologists. They were no longer needed. The radio and television stations, to say nothing of sea and air traffic, no longer needed their forecasts. The Met men were definitely forgotten men, with their maps unchanged, and their reports completely clear of all distances. Britain, and half Europe on one side and the Atlantic on the other, lay under the beneficent influence of a colonial and undisturbing anticyclone.

The Met men made protests to Parliament and even organized marches complete with banners—not only in England but in every country where weather forecasting had been a feature of daily life. They achieved a negligible result. They had no protection in law, and they certainly had not got public sympathy. Too many people—wrongfully, he it said—remembered the time when incorrect forecasts had been given. The public laughed in the faces of the Met men, and this body of trained individuals were forced into other modes of livelihood. One by one the Met stations closed down.

Here, then, were the first casualties. Others followed in quick succession. The weather bureau manufacturers went out of business in dozens. Rain would come, of course, when scheduled, but most of the manufacturers relied on it being an almost constant thing—in England, and the brief wet weather in the States. The parliamentary weather calendar did not at all justify the maintenance of big rainwater factories. So the casualty list increased, with only a few multiple firms remaining to supply the demand.

Among the farming communities there were endless debates on how to cash in on clockwork, infallible weather—and out of it there emerged new commercial enterprises for the growing of semi-tropical fruits as easily as tomatoes had formerly been grown.

From a general feeling of unreality and uncertainty in the spirit, men began to doubt the time in and the weather still remained unchanged. Calm, still, and sunny. The only difference lay in the rapidly shortening days, which, of course, had nothing to do with the weather anyhow.

One who took advantage of the perfect conditions, along with millions of others, were young David Brook and his Aunt Dora. Now completely absorbed into Dora Lester's family, David, nevertheless, wooded in his young mind, what he aspired to do completely in his mother's mother, and father from all contact with him. The matter seemed to recur to him as he and Dora took a belated November picnic one Sunday afternoon. For once they were together, the other members of the family were out elsewhere on various pursuits.

"Aunt Dora . . .
"Yes, dear? Dora looked questioningly from the long, dry grass as the youthful voice spoke.
"Aunt Dora, isn't this queer weather for November? I remember that last November I was nearly frozen."

"Yes, dear, it's queer weather all right. Nice, though. Quite warm even on a picnic."

"I wonder if dad's responsible in any way?" Dora started. "How could he be?"
"He was, rather, but that was a long time ago. So far as he's father and mother had been forced to go away indefinitely. Indeed, there was little more she could tell him. Though she suspected the horrible truth, there was no proof of it."

"I wonder if dad's gone away with mum to make his machines?"

"What machines?" Dora felt that she was groping for words.

"Well, dad did tell me once that when I was a man I'd be able to have nice weather whenever I wanted it. He said he was going to do it with machines, and no more picnics would ever be spoiled. I think they're dead."

"David! How can you say such a thing?" "I certainly believe it. I know they would never go away for so long and never on a picnic or something. . . ." David scrambled to his feet out of the grass and stood close to Dora, looking at her intently.

"I suppose you're old enough to know the facts—but even when I give them to you they don't mean much. I don't half understand it myself."

"Let me hear them, anyway," David suggested. "All right," he told him last year your father went to see a big engineering man in the city, and your mother followed him on the same day. They were sent to go into this engineering man's office but nobody ever saw them come out. They just disappeared, but that's no reason to suppose that they're dead."

"If they're not dead, where are they? They'd have come home, wouldn't they?"

"I suppose so," Dora agreed. "David, I just don't understand it. When your mother left you with me, after telling me where she was going, she never came back. I don't know where she is. I've never seen her since. Or your father either."

David said slowly: "Dad showed me a box thing he had with a sort of lens on the top. I remember one evening, he stopped a rainstorm with it. Come to think of it, your father went to see a big engineering man in the city, and your mother followed him on the same day. They were sent to go into this engineering man's office but nobody ever saw them come out. They just disappeared, but that's no reason to suppose that they're dead."

"It has everything to do with it. They make the weather so that it is perfect all the time. Haven't you seen that in the newspapers?"

David admitted. "But the papers are too dry to read. Look, aunty, this engineering man said went to see. Who was it? What was his name?"

"Marcus Denham."

Dora started. "But that's the same name as the man who's head of Climate Thingummy."

"Yes, same man," Dora assented, wondering where the boy's imagination was going to carry him.

"Then there's something funny," David decided, his young face peculiarly grim. "Dad takes him a weather box on a small scale, mother follows after him, and he makes me about them any more. . . . After that weather control on a big scale took up. All this is dad's idea. It has nothing to do with Marcus Denham."

"No doubt everything was legally arranged," Dora said rather carefully. "But that's all right. I agree that weather control is very like your dad's idea, but—"

"There just aren't any buts," David said simply. "It's the same thing, on a big scale, and I shan't rest until I know what it's all about."

"But, dear, there's nothing you can do. The police are doing all they can, and we mustn't interfere."

"I suppose not," David agreed, but to Dora it was plain he was only speaking words. At the back of his mind he meant to do a good deal . . . but not just yet. He was too young for that.

And, about this time, Marcus Denham himself was at the midst of a meeting with Nicholas Sutherland. He had not asked for it. Sutherland had simply presented himself, and for once his childlike geniality was absent. He looked—and was—dead.

"What's the idea, Denham?" he asked bluntly, tooting an immaculate hat on Denham's big desk.

"Idea?" Denham raised his eyebrows, his florid face somewhat hiked. "For that matter, I might ask you the same question. You come in here without being asked and—"

"I don't need to ask. We're old enemies, aren't we, and drop in on one another when we feel like it?" Sutherland sat at the opposite side of the desk. "I may know what's behind this weather-control business."

"Money," Denham replied laconically. "Or maybe you can think of a better reason?" "How much does Alvin Brook get out of it? You may fool everybody else, Denham, including the police, but you're not fooling me. Alvin Brook has vanished, and so has his wife, and I'm pretty

sure you know where they've gone to. . . . Or shall I put it more bluntly and say that you know where the bodies are?"

Denham exploded, his face purpling. "Do you dare to sit there and call me a murderer?" "—because I know exactly what kind of a man you are," Sutherland said. "You know about which you haven't spoken, Denham. I'll let you remain tight-lipped on one condition—that you call off this weather-control dictatorship and let a group of men and women from various countries handle it. That way it will no longer be the responsibility of one man."

"I thrive on responsibility," Denham said sourly.

Maybe—but your exclusive control of things does not do well for the rest of us. You have too much power, and though you haven't used it to the full as yet, I've not the least doubt that you will, when it suits you. It's got to stop."

"Just because you say so? Do you think I'm an idiot?"

"No. I think you're clever—clever as a fox and as brutal as the devil. . . ." Sutherland grinned mirthlessly. "You didn't know that Alvin Brook came to me for the first time, yesterday, presumably, coming to you, did you? I turned him down—but evidently you had greater vision."

Denham did not say anything; he was too busy looking at danger lights. He had thought that one Nicholas Sutherland would be the enemy of the boy David, of course. And now it seemed that his worst enemy knew plenty, too.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," Sutherland said. "Either you have sense and make this weather-control business the affair of a select body of people, from whom we can rightfully expect impartial decisions—or else I'll tear up everything by the roots to prove you murdered Alvin Brook—or otherwise got him out of the way—and stole his idea. You can please yourself. I'll give you a week to do as I suggest. If you haven't done anything by then you can look out for trouble."

He turned toward the door as Denham sat glancing after him; then at the door he turned.

"And, Denham—Don't waste your time having your own little things to do. You must try to win to them, and if they try anything like that they might end up in the same queer way as Alvin Brook and his wife."

The door closed decisively, and Denham sat scowling in front of him, only just appreciating the tightness of the spot he was in.

Calming somewhat, he took a cigar out of the box and lit it. He was alone in the interval, then his eyes lighted somewhat as the germ of an idea struck him. He pressed a button on the intercom.

"Have Mr. Richards come in here a moment."

"Yes, Mr. Denham."

There was an interval of a few minutes, then the tall figure of the scientist entered. He glanced inquiringly as he came across to the desk.

"Something's come up," Denham said briefly.

"You know as well as I do by this time that weather control isn't my own exclusive idea."

"I've gathered that a lot of it was conceived by Alvin Brook," Richards admitted, sitting down. "After which Brook conveniently disappeared along with his wife."

"Exactly. That's all anybody knows. Except one person who has been doing the investigation—really Alvin Brook's. He's turned awkward. He's going to turn everything inside out to prove the facts unless I agree to certain demands."

"And what are the demands?" Richards asked calmly, entirely sure of his position as chief scientist of Climate Incorporated.

"That I relinquish absolute control of Climate Incorporated and turn it over to a body of various men and women, thereby making all decisions impartial. In a word, I am a dictator—according to Nicholas Sutherland, the one man who knows too much."

"Nicholas Sutherland, eh? The oil tycoon?"

"The same—from which you'll see the extent of the danger. I refuse to give in to his demands, but I've also got to stop him investigating anything. That way it is to do as I suggest."

"That won't be easy, Mr. Denham. He's a big man."

"There is a way, and it can never be eluded as long as I'm in command of anything at all. It will be 'misadventure.' It necessitates using weather control as an offensive weapon for the first time."

"Oh?" Richards waited in puzzled interest.

"It is possible, as you know yourself, to produce localized weather conditions over any given spot. At will, heavy rain, frost, or a thunder or hailstorm can be created."

"True," the scientist admitted. "Sutherland's house, in Essex—out in the country, a big rambling Georgian mansion. I've been to it once. It's quite isolated, with the nearest village about five miles away. . . . Now, suppose a terrific localized thunderstorm broke over that spot? Suppose the mansion were destroyed, and Sutherland with it, by a bolt of lightning? Nobody could call that murder, could they?"

Richards was silent. It took him a moment to think about his family? They'll be with him, won't they?

"Unfortunately for them, yes. One can't discriminate."

"There'll be snags," Richards mused. "To produce a storm violent enough to create the lightning effect you suggest a strong atmospheric cold front will have to be launched, and that will have to move across a warm area, specially created in that area. The more violent storms are created on a cold front—or used to be before weather control. And the warm area will have to be created in the daytime."

"All right—create one," Denham shrugged. "Then bring in the cold front at night. Since that will mean heavy cloud as the cold front progresses, it's better to do it at night so Sutherland won't have any indication of what's happening. He'll probably be asleep. Also, the storm won't be anywhere else because it can't build up until it strikes the specially warm area around Sutherland's home."

Richards thought for a moment, then he sighed a little and got to his feet.

"All right, Mr. Denham, I'll do as you ask. I'll chart the path of this localized storm, and then I'll release it when you give the word. All I have to be sure of is that he'll be at home when the blow falls."

"I'll make sure of that," Denham promised. "I'll start right away and have Sutherland's movements watched. Even if he becomes aware of the surveillance, he won't be able to do anything about it. How long will it take you to chart the storm track?"

"Oh, about six hours. Let me know when to release it."

So Denham and Richards both went to work, and naturally Nicholas Sutherland had no idea what was intended. He was certainly alert for any dirty business on the part of Denham's many strong-arm men—but the thought of a storm, specially created and driven in his direction, never remotely occurred to him. . . . Which was the main reason why it succeeded.

A week later, following a cloudless day with heat abnormally oppressive in the Essex area, a storm broke over the county about 3 o'clock in the morning. It only lasted 30 minutes, but in that 30 minutes hell was let loose on a cottage, a car, or house was left standing. Trees were felled by the hundreds and nearly dry brooks rose to overflowing. At the close of the storm a cyclonic wind lifted the roofs of hundreds of houses, and the first red light of dawn revealed a blackened and lightning-riven waste.

Dawn pilots, specially assigned by Denham, explored the area and then came back with the news. The mansion of Nicholas Sutherland had disappeared as though hit by a bomb. All that remained were a few blackened stones sunk deep in cooling mud.

★ ★ ★

The "freak" storm over Essex disturbed public confidence quite a lot and, as had expected, Denham had his hands full, explaining away the disaster. His main line was that one of the machines had developed a fault, and before its rectification had been possible the storm had broken out. It was regrettable, of course, but just one of those things. Richards verified this theory and, in the end, the public accepted it because there was no other course.

So calm returned, and the weather calendar was adhered to. From the Boxing Day high winds and snowfalls were present and, from Boxing Day to New Year it was mild again. So on up the calendar scale to April 5, when the slow transition to ordered, perfect summer weather

commenced. Apparently everything in the garden was lovely.

The ordered weather was both a benefit and a menace. That could be seen clearly now. The changed economic and social conditions which had existed since the onset of climate control were now more pronounced than ever, and particularly in England, where a reliable climate had formerly been unknown.

In one hand there were vast industrial changes; on the other the curious growing mental apathy of the British people. Normally geared to an eternal struggle with disturbed weather, temperamental was underlying a change to a more leisurely, drowsy attitude typical of the people of the Italian, Spanish, and Mediterranean countries. Keen business sense was lacking, and although it was an comparatively new innovation, weather control was commencing to present itself as a menace. This much the far-seeing ones already knew. . . . But not Denham. He was quite satisfied, as well he might be, seeing the chaos he was collecting and adding to his already colossal financial pile.

It was Spain who raised the first protest over weather control. Senor Vandaez, head of the Spanish equivalent of the trade unions, made a special visit to Britain in order to see the new, and went direct to Denham's headquarters. Denham greeted him cordially, but his pleasant soon vanished when he heard what the Spaniard had to say.

"Mr. Denham, my country requires a release from weather control," Vandaez's English was nearly perfect, and his enthusiasm tremendous. "Our climate has gone completely wrong since weather control came in, and we are not getting the kind of weather we asked for. We were better off before control of the climate was attempted. It was in your foot the English weather has descended on us, and it is rapidly ruining our industries—which your country has assumed in competition with us."

Denham frowned a little. "I don't quite understand."

"No? Surely it is simple? Our main industry was formerly the export of dates, oranges, pomegranates, figs, malvas, groundnuts, cotton, and so forth. Now that industry is fast vanishing due to the change in climate. Your country, on the other hand, is developing—during the summer months which belong to us—such crops as wheat. Vandaez stared at Denham anxiously. "It cannot go on, Mr. Denham. As a country we shall become useless. Rain falls constantly on lands which have been dry all season. Once even we had snow. An unheard-of thing!"

Denham shrugged. "So you object, senor, because Britain has assumed industries usually assigned to sub-tropical climates? You object to our growing oranges and the rest of it? You imagine you have an exclusive right to a fair climate and constant sun?"

"No, Mr. Denham. We have no exclusive right to the conditions which now beset us. Rain, wind, even snow—at this most beautiful time of the year."

"We will do what we can to straighten things out," Denham promised, at which Vandaez rose to his feet with a look of obvious contempt.

"I think you can save yourself the trouble, Mr. Denham. We of Spain intend to dissociate ourselves entirely from weather control, and all the evils that go with it."

Vandaez departed, an extremely angry man. Denham stood for a while, looking down on London in the midst of its drowsy heat. His eyes travelled to the parklike space nearby where palm trees had been planted in the hope of flourishing. Even he was struck for a moment by the fantasy of it all. Sub-tropical England and incipient Spain. The old order had completely changed. . . . Then he went over to the intercom and summoned Richards.

The scientist arrived in a few moments, his expression inquiring. He listened as Denham told him of Vandaez's complaint.

"What can you do about it?" Denham demanded. "Spain isn't so important in the scheme of things, but if other countries start complaining as well, we may soon find Climate Incorporated very strong foundations."

Richards shrugged. "Not much, I can do. Mr. Denham, and you know that yourself. Spain, most of Northern Africa, and Libya, have become what we call temperate spots. They receive the atmospheric currents which our climate machines hold

at bay. They are, so to speak, in the safety-valve region. You know as well as I do that we cannot completely block the natural winds and drifts without causing trouble, so certain regions—unimportant ones—have been assigned as temperate spots. Into these regions pass the normal winds, air currents and rain areas. Spain, North Africa and Libya don't produce anything particularly useful to the world economy, nothing that we can't now produce ourselves, and so, they're reclaimed."

"Why didn't you consult me before settling on these temperate spots?" Denham snapped.

"I hardly thought it necessary. There have to be four temperate spots, and we've decided that the climate will be like corking up steam in a bottle. There are four other areas."

"Four other areas, do you say? Four? Where are they?"

"The West Indies, Iceland, Northern Finland, and Northern Ireland. None of them produce anything worth while, or have any climatic machines on their territory, so it doesn't matter much if they become temperate spots."

"That's only your own opinion, Richards! When all of them start complaining to the world trade council, we'll have a lot of talking. We're supposed to be providing whatever weather is wanted, by whatever country. In the case of the West Indies, Iceland, North Ireland and Spain—to say nothing of the West Indies and Libya, that hasn't been done. A change has got to be made. For instance—what about the Arctic and Antarctic regions? Why can't there be 'safety zones' there? Those areas are just wilderness."

Richards got up and studied the map from a distance; then he nodded slowly. "Yes, I suppose it could be done."

"Then a change it," Denham ordered. "And quickly. The annoying part, to my mind, is that there should have to be 'safety valves' at all. We'll have to see if we can't work something out to make the atmospheric circuit complete."

Richards nodded slowly. "I'm afraid we'll not manage that, Mr. Denham. The earth and its normal atmosphere and wind drift will always remain, no matter how we try to mould the balance. Besides, the world over, we must allow an outlet, or there'll be a disaster. . . . Yes, you're probably right, Richards," Denham gave a gloomy nod. "All right, we'll have to take the matter slowly. Get busy on these new safety areas right away."

"O.K."

It was a long job and for a while altered the balance of the world over.

Then, slowly, as the machines began to force new atmospheric patterns, the pleasant conditions of yore were gradually established. England returned to its semi-tropical status; Canada basked in a too-hot summer. America reclaimed under perfect weather—and to Spain there came the burning sun and cloudless sky to which it was accustomed. The rains and gales departed from North Africa and Libya, and the West Indies, Iceland and Northern Ireland had good weather.

In a word, everybody was satisfied once more. Radio, television and newspapers proclaimed the fact; and with the realization of it Denham began to relax again, how closely he had come to a major disaster.

Yet perfection had not been achieved. There was always something in the background, liable to cause trouble—and because he was at the centre of this spider's web of climatic control, Marcus Denham was the first to hear about it. . . . It was nearing the end of the bleaching summer—late August to be exact—when he received a shock. Richards came into the office one morning, his habitual calm ruffled.

"Are you at liberty for a moment, Mr. Denham?"

"Surely," Denham looked up from his desk. He was working in air-conditioned coolness, the shades down across the sunlit windows. "Anything wrong?"

"I'm afraid so. There may be plenty of trouble blowing up."

"What? Again?" Denham gave a groan. "I thought we'd got everything ironed out."

Richards hurried over to the projection map, talking as he went.

"It's about the 'safety-valve' areas. Things aren't working out at all well. I've just been looking through the reports of the pilots who maintain a constant run over the climatic courses. It seems that the Arctic and Antarctic regions have

answered. "The stoppage of one machine and not the others will cause a lot of trouble. I'll get it but we've learned by now how to get things under control again very rapidly."

"That being settled," Denham said, rising, "I'm bringing this meeting to a close and I'll get busy right away. There's no time to be lost."

* * *

So Marcus Denham took the step which he knew could only lead to absolute authority. For a time, most nations were stunned by his audacity, and the international court, outraged and enraged—but even so, none had the courage to defy Denham's threats. No country was prepared to risk killer-tornadoes or crippling fronts, which were Denham's main threat, for the sake of the international court, so Denham had his way. As indeed he did in London. The military arrived to take charge of the London-control and Denham gave them an hour to get out, or he would not do so, he was determined to shatter the international court building itself, to say nothing of the town in which it stood, with a terrific magnetic storm. The military retired, on orders from the court.

Denham smiled to himself, and so did his board of directors. Climate Incorporated was making the world eat out of its hand, and its word was law. No man's word was rendered impossible. Denham agents maintained a constant surveillance, making his grip on the world unique. No gangster ever sucked such toll from the victim of Wealth, commerce, finance—they all flowed to England, which was, in a sense, under the dictates of Climate Incorporated. Marcus Denham was established, and supremely satisfied that nobody could question his authority and nobody did. For 10 years.

By this time the world had come to accept Marcus Denham and Climate Incorporated as a necessary evil. Every country in his grasp, not perhaps visibly since every country still had its own laws and form of society, but since climate is the governing factor in any form of existence, Denham naturally had the last word. Rich, immensely powerful, he still had a kind of a mystic about him—Britain, once a rain-wooded island, had become a tropical paradise, the edifice of Climate Incorporated being surrounded by giant conifers and palm trees.

The people, too, changed in 10 years. The apathy which had set in when the climate had first started to be controlled, was now complete. The average Englishman or woman was an easygoing, contented individual of the Spenser type, accustomed now to a warm, genial climate, and, of course, a part of the enormous wealth which had made the country the richest on earth.

The safety-valve areas in Arctic and Antarctic still existed, and had turned those formerly frigid continents into wastes of rain and hurricanes all the year round. Denham had had the brilliant idea of erecting climatic laboratories in these regions, in which most countries had agreed. Thereby, convicted criminals were removed from the heart of normal society and transferred to lands of incessant tempest where the rains came at intervals, where currents ran ceaselessly, and indeed essentially. If ever those safety valves ceased to provide outlet, the havoc would be beyond imagining.

Probably in the whole of the world there was nobody who knew that Marcus Denham was cashing in magnificently on an invention which was not his own. The ones who did know, in his immediate circle, were too comfortable to bother—and outside the circle there was Dora Lester, too busy with her own family to be able to do anything. But there was David Brook, now 22 years old—and he is all the people who knew the truth had not forgotten.

Through adolescence he had matured a plan, and at 22 he started to put it into effect. He left the care of Aunt Dora and started out to make his own way—first enlisting in the London Air Force Patrol, an organization specially created by Denham for the purpose of keeping a night and day check on the climatic machines in every country where they were situated.

As Richard Morton, David Brook did his job faithfully and turned in his reports as requested. He was a model pilot, a good engineer, and extremely close-lipped about everything he did.

He had been in the force for nearly a year when he came into contact with Ruth Dornsey, a slim, gray-eyed blonde employed as a senior clerk in the offices of London-control. The meeting was

by chance at an air force patrol social evening, but as he came to know Ruth Dornsey better it seemed to David that the occurrence had decided significance. For one thing, Ruth Dornsey, by reason of her job, knew all the details of the various climatic stations. She was a girl whose devotion was emanated from into the upper atmosphere: she knew the positions of the cables which supplied the power to the climatic machine power-houses. She knew every detail about them, and technically, was sworn to secrecy concerning them, even though she could not see the reason for it. Her young and innocent mind couldn't possibly see that Marcus Denham was then—always alert for spies and possible saboteurs.

Once he knew secrecy intervened, David set his plan to break it down. The girl could help his plan by his disloyal activities. So he went to work on his way to win her friendship, and what had begun as a purely business enterprise on David's part, changed gradually to the realization that he was very much in love with Ruth Dornsey. She seemed to have a profound understanding of his nature. She was in love, too, but so far had not admitted it.

"I suppose," David said, one day when they both sat simultaneously off-time and had taken a picnic together, "you're wondering what kind of a fellow I really am."

"I don't know," Ruth was lying on her back, looking at the cobalt blue of the man-made sky. "Isn't it enough that I like to be with you?" "But you know so little about me," David murmured. "I never have been one to talk much about myself—and yet, in spite of that, you've always come with me when I've asked you. . . . Don't you ever wonder who I am? What I am? Why I have so little to say?"

"You set up, in sunlight in her fair hair. 'No, Dick, I don't really wonder. I've formed my own opinion of your character, and I'm satisfied with it.'"

David thought for a moment, then he said: "I don't know, which I mean, I'm going to straight right away. I rely on you to keep it to yourself. My name isn't really Richard Morton: it's David Brook. My father was Alvin Brook, and he was an inventor." "But I've always thought it was Marcus Denham's idea," David smiled grimly. "So does everybody else. I've never known my father until now. I remember him demonstrating it to me—and my mother—on a wet summer evening. He took it to Denham to get financial backing. After that my father and mother disappeared and have never been seen since."

Ruth was silent for a long time, her gray eyes searching David's face. Then at last she nodded slowly. "Yes, David, I believe you. Every word. Go on."

"I believe," David said slowly, "that they were murdered. How or when this was I don't say—nor can anybody, apparently—but that's my belief. Denham cashed in on the idea my father invented, and as you know, the control of the climate has given him power such as no man ever possessed before."

"Yes, that's true enough," Ruth admitted quickly. "But what do you do about it? You can't fight Climate Incorporated. It's too powerful."

"I can—and I'm going to. It's my one object in life. That's why I said you know so little about me. You know now what I'm driving at. I'm going to try to smash Denham and climate-control well, if it's at all possible. Don't you understand? I owe that much to my father and mother. I'm sure they agree with my obsession, wherever they are."

"David, let's look at this business seriously," Ruth caught hold of David's hand and looked at him seriously. "I know how you feel, how sure must be consumed with the desire to know just what's happened and climate-control for a moment. What chance do you stand? I don't want you to do things that will result in your being killed. You're much too precious to me for that."

David's hard, frustrated expression passed for a moment. He leaned forward and kissed her tenderly. She kissed him back and for a moment they clung in the embrace of each other; then David touched again.

"It's not such an impossible thing as it looks," he said. "I know the risk, but I'm prepared to take it. I've got to do it. Ruth, it's a sort of duty."

"All right," Ruth gave a little shrug. "You're set on it, and you must do it. All I can do is

help you, since I can't dissuade you. I don't agree with Denham's world, I don't agree more than you do, but I certainly can't see what I can do about it."

"You can do a lot. I realized that the moment I knew you were in the offices of London-control." Then she gave him a startled, even so slightly. David added quickly: "But please don't think that was why I kept so friendly with you. It wasn't. I want you for yourself—more than I've ever wanted anything before."

Ruth smiled, something of the smile of a mother for a lovable but rather naughty boy. She said: "I said before that I believe you, and nothing you say now will change my opinion. So you believe I can help you? Tell me how."

"Well, for one thing, you know all about the various climatic stations; you know from which point the radiation is emitted into the atmosphere; you know the positions of the cables which supply power to the climatic stations. You can even get hold of blueprints sent out in detail all these particulars."

"Yes."

"All right. In my job as a patrol pilot I view the climatic machine stations constantly from the air, wherever they are situated, in every part of the world. I've taken many photographs of each one, but it's not easy at the height I am forced to maintain by regulations, to see the details I want."

"I know the situations of the stations, but I don't know the details of them. For example, in one station, blowing up one of the stations with a bomb would be no use if I didn't succeed in destroying the vital output point. Or, similarly, I might not cut off any power supply. So long as those two points remained undamaged, the engineers could have things rectified in a few short hours. I've got to have absolute destruction when I start."

Ruth was looking straight at him, must his "You don't mean you're going to bomb the climatic stations, surely?"

"Yes," David nodded almost casually. "That's just what I'm going to do. Bomb them one after the other. The bombs will be small nuclear ones, but I know Denham's taken the precaution to have the climatic houses shielded against nuclear attack. That means that even a direct hit might be deflected. I must, therefore, be sure to destroy the vital part, either the output or input power. That's why I want the details of where these two vital points are. Once I have that, I can pinpoint the exact photographs, and my bombastic training will do the rest."

Ruth was silent, looking absent in front of her. It was a little time before she stirred herself to speak.

"I can, of course, get the information you want, David—and I know you won't betray my confidence in any way, but do you think it's worth it? You can get away with destroying the stations. You'll be caught, and you know the results."

"I don't think I shall. I've got it organized. Besides, when the stations are destroyed there'll pass terrific confusion while the climate returns to normal and it will be impossible to do anything. Matter of fact, that's the one thing that worries me—the upheaval when the control is gone."

"You're sure there'll be one?"

"Bound to be. One can't keep natural forces at bay, then suddenly relax the dam, so to speak, without something happening. However, when it's over, things will be back on a normal footing and natural climate will return."

"Which, as far as England is concerned, won't be too pleasant," Ruth sighed, with a wistful glance toward the sub-tropical sky.

"If I could bring England as much as anybody, but I'm trying to take the realistic view—namely, that my mother and father were murdered by Marcus Denham, and that the whole world was to live in this money-grubbing dictator because he's using a stolen idea. Nobody else is going to do anything, so I'm going to—yes, even if it kills me."

"Nobody else?" Ruth questioned. "I'm going to do my share, but I've forgotten."

"Sure?" David looked at her for a moment. "I got carried away for the moment."

"I know, dearie. . . . But what you're going to do is right as far as you know it to be, and for that reason I'm with you. I'll get those particulars, and you'll want to know how to work. Then you can work it out. That right?"

"Perfect," David smiled, and kissed the girl warmly as she raised her face to his. Then they

went hand in hand through the tall, dry grass in the direction of the little village, down by the sea.

They had vanished from sight when a third person rose out of the grass—a shabbily clothed individual with three days of stubble on his weather-beaten face and hair so long it reached down into the collar of his threadbare jacket. Definitely one of nature's gentlemen if ever there was one. Hobos were few in these days, but those who did take to the road were sure of reliable weather. So it was with Horace Alfred Jenkins, ex-actor, tramping the country for reasons of both health and finance. But now he saw a chance to perhaps relieve his pecuniary embarrassment. He looked at David and Ruth had exchanged would make interesting hearing to Marcus Denham.

CHAPTER VII

TO secure an interview with Marcus Denham was difficult at the best of times, and for a down-at-the-heels tramp like Jenkins it was nearly impossible. Then mention of the name David Brook, by way of the commissaire, seemed to do the trick. Horace Alfred Jenkins got his interview.

"Well," Denham demanded, impaling Jenkins with a fierce blue eye. "What's all this nonsense you've been talking about David Brook?"

"It is not nonsense, my good sir; it is truth," Jenkins spoke in his best actor's voice and spread his hands at the same time. "All this afternoon I lay in the grass and listened to David Brook talking to a young girl by the name of Ruth."

"Well, what's so unique about that, man? Young men and young women have been talking nonsense to each other ever since the world began."

"True, sir, but this was not nonsense. The talking of nothing else but the destruction of climate control, and the murder of David Brook's mother and father."

"Oh?" Denham concealed his surprise. He motioned to a chair but Jenkins shook his head.

"No, sir, I think not. My clothes are not in the best of condition for such furniture as this office possesses. I will remain standing, with your permission. . . . All I request is that you give me a casual token of gratitude in return for what I have to tell you."

"You won't go away empty-handed; you have my word on that. Now start talking."

Jenkins hesitated, then he obeyed. He repeated in detail the conversation David and Ruth had had, right from the moment when David had said, "I suppose you're wondering what kind of a fellow I am?"

At the end of the repetition Denham sat meditating, an unlit cigar speared between his teeth.

"Very interesting indeed," he commented finally. "Very interesting indeed. I'm quite indebted to you, Mr. Jenkins."

"I thought you would be, sir. That being so, may I ask for financial return for the information?"

"Yes, may I ask," Denham shrugged, "but you won't get it. It is quite obvious that you've heard a good many things concerning me—things which I should not like repeated in public. I have to safeguard myself, you understand?"

"Rest assured, sir, that not a word will escape me."

"I intend to be absolutely sure of that," Denham pressed a button on his desk and after a considerable interval the commissaire from the entrance hall entered.

"Yes, Mr. Denham?"

"Mr. Jenkins is leaving. See that he is conducted properly out of the building."

"Look here," Jenkins started to protest, but he had no chance to get any further. He was whisked out into the corridor and the office door closed. Immediately Denham reached to the telephone and dialled swiftly.

"London-control, clerical division," came a voice in the receiver.

"Denham here. Check up among your senior officials in the clerical division and see if you have a young woman by the name of Ruth working among you. I want her surname."

"Right, sir. I'll call you back."

Denham grunted something and rang off. Then he contacted, again by phone, the air force patrol headquarters and was soon in touch with the personnel officer.

"I believe," Denham said, "you have a young

pilot on the patrol list by the name of Richard Morton. Will you check on that and give me the particulars of his background, history and so forth?"

"It won't take a moment, sir."

There was an interval, during which Denham sat doodling on his blotter and listening to the rustle of papers at the other end. Then the voice spoke again:

"Richard Morton, sir, is aged 22 and joined the patrol a year ago. A first-class pilot and has done his work well. His background is rather hazy. Apparently an orphan, brought up by an aunt. Nothing much more about him. . . . Height about five feet six, blue-eyes and brown-haired."

"Right. Now listen: Remove Morton from all patrols until further instructions from me. Ground him. Do not give him access to anything of a secret nature. Understood?"

"I'll do exactly as you order, sir."

Denham rang off and scowled in thought for a moment, then as the phone shrilled he whipped it up.

"Oh?" Denham here.

"Clerical division, sir. We have an employee in the senior department by the name of Ruth Densey."

"Thank you," Denham said curtly, and rang off. In another moment he was in contact with the central police division. The voice of the police chief himself answered.

"I've a job for you," Denham said. "And I want it done properly. Investigate the life and background of pilot Richard Morton of the air force patrol. His real name is probably David Brook. Let me know what information you get, and I want it quickly. . . . Also take precautions against him making any attempt to obtain bombs or explosive materials. Advise the necessary quarters. Check!"

"I'll attend to it, Mr. Denham."

"There's another thing. I want you to find the home address of Ruth Densey, a young woman in the clerical division of C.I. Have her picked up and brought to me."

"As soon as possible," the chief agreed.

Denham rang off and then glanced up at the hall commissaire entered.

"I dispatched Jenkins as you requested, sir," he announced.

"Good. Where did you send him?"

"At the moment, sir, he's on his way to the Antarctic penitentiary. I assumed that would be in order."

"Quite in order," Denham grinned. "If he'd been left to his own devices he could have been quite a nuisance. . . . All right, you can go."

It was two days before Denham got the information he wanted. He had David Brook picked up and, along with Ruth Densey, he was brought to Denham's office. In silence he watched them brought in, then he dismissed the police officer and sat regarding the two young people facing him.

"Naturally, you're wondering what all this is about," he asked gruffly, his eyes fixed on David's face.

"I'll try to tell you," David began.

It concerns a conversation you two had together in the fields a couple of days ago."

"I didn't know you had spies there, too," David retorted.

"It won't pay you to adopt that tone, Brook," Denham said coldly. "I know exactly who you are, thanks to police inquiry, and I also know what you intended to do to the various climatic machines in different parts of the world. . . . A very foolishly planned plot, if I may say so—and there's even more shame on you for dragging this girl into it, too."

"I went into it of my own accord," Ruth said, her face defiant. "No force was used. After what David told me, I quit agreed with his plans."

Denham shrugged. "Miserable fool, you young woman. You are trying to help a young man who is obviously mad."

"You murdered my father and mother in some way or other, and stole the invention my father tried to tell you," David said.

Denham sighed. "All right, I won't argue with you. The only thing that surprises me is that the air force patrol ever passed you as mentally sane. . . . Physically sound. However, the truth has been discovered in time." Denham reflected for a moment, his small blue eyes on David's face. "I take it you have heard of the Arctic and Antarctic penitentiaries?"

Ruth gave a start and looked at David quickly,

then she looked back at Denham.

"You're not going to send him there, surely? You can't! You just—"

"As for you, young woman. . . ." Denham's hard eyes were fixed on her. "As for you, too, your employment in the clerical division of this organization will end forthwith. You will be transferred to the women's labor corps for a period of three years, which naturally means you will be divested of all civic rights."

★ ★ ★

From then on, David Brook's life was a nightmare. He was kept in the city for two days and nights, in the prison cells, and then was transferred to the latest batch of criminals due for the Arctic penitentiary. Hardened cases, most of them, and the guards not much better. A special airplane, of the troop-carrying variety, made the journey from London to the storm-lashed wastes of the Arctic, in the midst of which loomed the solitary plateau where stood the forbidding edifice of Arctic penitentiary.

But David Brook never lost heart, even though absorbed into this mire of human misery. He was not dead, and that was the main thing. As long as there was life there was still a chance, and being quite a young man, his physique was equal to the tasks of hard labor thrust upon him.

Although he was a model prisoner. He gave the guards no trouble, incited no riots, never made demands. Each day he worked immensely hard, usually digging rock and rubble in lashing rain and screaming wind, helping to lay the foundations of an extension to the penitentiary.

But all the time he watched his chance, or thought of the climatic machines, or perhaps Ruth. What had happened to her? And was she now absorbed in the labor corps? If anything made him anxious to escape it was the thought of Ruth, or the searing satisfaction of Denham. Denham, the man responsible for all this! Denham, the murderer, the thief. . . .

David went on digging, an iron-muscled, grim-faced young man. He made friends of sorts; men who like him had been sent there for some offence against the laws instituted by Denham. One friend in particular—Martin Fornham—shared his cell with him. He was a man of 45, aged 20 years and was a good deal of a fellow, too, in the midst of nearly impossible climatic conditions.

David and Martin Fornham came at last to an exchange of confidences, after eight months of captivity together. Each felt he could trust the other, and so was quite clear from Fornham's conversation that he was convinced the Arctic penitentiary was the end of the line.

"You talk about escaping," he said, lying on his bunk and eyeing David in the dim cell light. "There isn't an earthly chance of it, lad. Nothing but temper and a devil's own call all around us, and the place crawling with guards. No living soul can beat this—and even if you got as far as the ocean, you'd be shot before you could cover a dozen yards."

"There's a supply plane once a month," David remarked. "I'm a skilled pilot. I might arrange somehow to steal that plane."

"No idea," Fornham said. "You'd get nowhere. Once on this plateau and it's the finish. Try to start realizing it."

"Why should I? I'm young; I've got important things to do, and no infernal penitentiary is going to stop me. I'll get out—somehow."

"Up to you," Fornham shrugged. "I've tried it, and I know it can't be done. Besides, things have been tightened up since I made my attempt. . . . Anyway, what are you so anxious to get out for? Got a girl or sweetheart waiting for you?"

"I have a girl, yes. In the labor corps for trying to help me. She got landed there and I came here."

"What was the charge?"

"Marcus Denham called it treason. . . . I planned nothing less than the destruction of his climatic machines. They're ruination. He's got David murdered. David thought he was a friend."

Denham meditated, drawing on the meagre ration of his cigar.

"I suppose," he said, "that most men will cash in to the money. However, you've got more than them power. Denham's doing no more than that. Unfortunately, he happens to be a pretty bad lot."

"More than that—he's a murderer. My father was the first victim of climatic control. He died at Denham's hands, and so did my mother."

I'd planned everything so that I could smash the climate machines in revenge but things went wrong. So—I'm here."

"Your father was the real inventor?" Forham repeated incredulously.

"Yes," David gave the details as he lay propped on one elbow in his bunk. "Now you can see why I want revenge."

"Sure I can see—but I think you went the wrong way about it. You don't need to smash the climate machines to destroy weather control. There's an easier way, if you can do it. I ought to know. I used to be a Met man, but with the coming of climatic control I fell on hard times, did some thieving and generally got into trouble, and ended up here."

"What do you mean—there's an easier way?" David demanded.

"Simple enough," Forham crushed out his cigarette stub on the edge of the bunk. "Find a way to bottle up the temperate areas and climatic control will soon finish. Or, more correctly, it will blow up. Explode."

David slid from his bunk and crossed to the older man. He looked down on him with fixed interest.

"Explode? What are you talking about?" "Look, lad, how do you think climatic control stands up? How do you think it functions?" "By hot and cold currents produced by molecular vibration. I know that from what my father told me from time to time, and I've had time to read his notes."

"Then you ought to know that there have to be safety valves, as they're called. Of recent years the safety-valve areas have been located in the Arctic and Antarctic: that's why the weather here is in a constant turmoil. The vibratory currents issued from the climatic stations form a barrier to normal atmospheric conditions, and don't allow those normal conditions to operate. They have to be discharged somewhere—just the same as steam in a boiler would blow up the boiler if it had no safety valves."

"So the Arctic and Antarctic regions are really the normal air currents discharging themselves—the currents that normally would flow over the world?" David questioned.

"That's it. Warmth, cold, rain, wind—they all discharge at the Poles, which creates the temperate spots."

David sat in thought on the edge of Forham's bunk. Forham looked at him for a moment or two and then said:

"So you see—destroying the climatic machines is only one way. There's the other way—bottling up the safety valves. Since one is as impossible as the other, it's not worth worrying over."

"Perhaps not so impossible," David said slowly, looking into space. "Perhaps not, Mart."

* * *

Thereafter, David did not waste any time in going into action, starting first by testing a theory which he had held privately ever since he had become a prisoner on the planet. He felt that he was risking everything but he considered it worth it. He could not be in a much worse position than he was at present, and the chance he was going to take might lead to freedom.

The next day, when his shift of work was over, he succeeded in being granted an interview with the prisoner governor, a hard-faced, grimy-eyed man, as happier than the prisoners he controlled. There was talk of the fact that he was a criminal himself, otherwise he would never have been on this tempest-lashed plateau surrounded by dangerous men and merciless gray walls.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked curtly, as David faced him across the desk. "Make it short."

"What would you be prepared to do to get away from this island, this storm-bound planet?" David asked deliberately, and the governor's eyebrows rose in surprise.

"What would I be prepared to do?" he repeated, then he laughed shortly. "Get the cart before the horse, haven't you? A governor has no wish to escape: it's the prisoner who wants to do that."

"I know, and I wish to escape as much as anybody. I'm trying to find out, sir, if you wish to do as well."

"I should imagine anybody in their right senses would be glad to get away from here," the governor shrugged. "As far as I am concerned, it can be done. I've decided to perform the feat."

"The duties of governor," David said. "For

what? For Marcus Denham, and nobody else. Why don't you look at this thing in the right light? In a place like this you're as much a prisoner as anybody else. All of us doomed to stay on this plateau, at the mercy of the most violent weather conditions ever known to man."

"We put up with it," the governor said, musing. "We've no need to," David snapped. "You know some of the facts about me, but I don't think you know the real reason for my being here."

"The records say treasonable activity."

"Which is a complete lie. I'm David Brook by real name, the son of Alvin Brook who invented weather control. Marcus Denham has no legal right to control of the weather."

"Oh?" The governor waited, his brow raised; then he listened as David gave him the facts. When he had heard them, he gave a whimsical smile.

"Even if I believe you, I am inclined to do—I don't see what you can do about it. You haven't an earthly chance of proving your case in any court of law. If I thought that was possible I'd guess you leave to enter legal aid."

"I don't want it. All I need is your co-operation to smash Marcus Denham completely—and the grip C.I. has on the world. It can be done, right here. The only other thing necessary is collusion with Antarctica Penitentiary. Get that, and Marcus Denham will be finished."

"How will he? If this is just a pipe-dream, you—"

"It's no pipe-dream. If we built a climatic machine and another in Antarctica and so bottled up completely the safety valves, climatic control—and Denham—would end in a fortnight, or even less. I can build such a machine because I know of years of study made by my father put into the apparatus. I can't make bricks without straw, though. If you can get the materials, I'll do the rest. . . ."

The governor was silent, his work forgotten, his mind around the window on the big, dark, rain outside. After a moment he got to his feet and paced thoughtfully around the office.

"I could have you transferred to solitary for what you're doing," he commented, smiling grimly. "I should even be within my rights in sentencing you to death—but as I said before, I believe you. I believe you for another reason apart from my being in charge of the prisoner—the man you were sent here for a crime I did not commit. Everybody here, captives and guards, has supposedly offended against society in some way—or, more accurately, has been a criminal, in rebelling against Climate Incorporated. I have nothing to lose by giving you a chance, Brook. It doesn't matter to me if every prisoner on this plateau escapes, so long as I escape with them. . . . What you're doing is putting the sear to a rebellion. You realize that?"

David nodded. "Yes. Somebody has to, and I've more reason than anybody, particularly after what happened to my father and mother. I'll carry this thing through to the end, or die in the attempt. Rely on that."

"Now, what are the materials you want?"

CHAPTER VIII

A YEAR named, and to England and the countries paying the highest fees, they came again a cloudless summer. America, Canada, and the whole of Western Europe basked in the still, burning glory of a gigantic man-made anticyclone, a high pressure system that would remain motionless until the autumn when, at Denham's word, conditions would change to much-needed rain.

And at the Poles of the earth there were still the temperate spots, the safety valves by which the normal air currents made their escape. Reports from the prisons at either Pole showed everything to be satisfactory. Not that Denham cared anything. The outcasts of society, the dangerous to him, were shut away for good, cut off from those nearest and dearest to them, grinding out what was left of their lives in continents where the climate was the same, and where the seasons varied from frigid to tropical in a matter of hours. Certainly nobody ever suspected that a rebellion had started, and that the cloud no larger than a man's hand was already forming—and through the summer grew in dimensions and importance.

Only one person in particular thought often of

the Arctic penitentiary and sighed wistfully for what might have been. . . . Rosh Dornity, with some of her three-year sentence with the women's labor camp behind her. She thought constantly of David and wondered what had happened to him: the ever-elusive, the one who had visited her in her sentence was ended. Otherwise she went on day by day, uniformed, divested of all civil rights and freedom, working in the clerical section of the corps who must maintain the setting up of communications between cities—electrical and telephonic—a task not too heavy for women, but with all the rigidity of prison discipline, just the same.

There was no freedom, no security, no safety, and also a power in the land. His complete disavowal of principles and his loyalty to Marcus Denham had made him a wealthy, influential man. He came and went as he pleased, at will, at any time, always at the beck and call. He travelled leisurely around the storm-free world, calling at the various climatic stations to survey their functions, lounging in the best hotels with an endless supply of money at his command.

Yet the cloud no bigger than a man's hand grew a little larger, and the first definite sign of its presence came in mid-July when Richards was one of his usual tours of inspection. He got a decided shock when he visited the colossal edifice at Spitzbergen, which housed the climatic machine nearest to the Arctic Circle. Not that the Arctic Circle had ever existed any more. It was as ever, one of the temperate spots, the fury of insane weather conditions existing a scant 100 miles from the sunny Spitzbergen station.

Yes, Richards got a shock. He stood at the far end of the huge gangway which ran down the central length of the station. He looked at the great black wall of dials and studied them in silence. They gave reports of the atmosphere, the weather, every part of the world, together with a dozen other factors essential to the balanced control of the climate. But there was something different from previous occasions.

Normally, the meters attached to the other stations around the world should be recording a constant "0"—the zero equivalent of non-disturbance. On this occasion, however, Richards noted big divergences between stations, some recording as high as "35" degrees disturbance, and others "2" and "3".

Richards abruptly, Richards snapped his fingers. The resident boss of the station caught his signal and came hurrying over.

"Why hasn't this been reported to London?" Richards demanded, nodding to the dials. "You've got one to five degrees of disturbance and never said anything about it."

"I didn't see any reason to worry London, control."

"What do you mean—didn't see any reason?"

"The disturbance isn't causing any trouble, Mr. Richards. The machines in all stations are functioning perfectly: we keep a constant check on that."

"Naturally, that's part of your job, but you're also expected to use your initiative. Can't you see that there's outside influence at work here, which has nothing to do with the smooth running of the station?"

The station chief looked puzzled. "But what outside influence can there be? There just isn't any with the whole world ringed with stations."

"It's there, and we've got to know why," Richards snapped. He inspected the dials again and then asked: "How much disturbance value is produced by being so near to the Arctic temperate spot?"

"About two. Never more."

"Yet here we've got five, and not limited to this one station. There's disturbance on every station, which shows climatic control is no longer in perfect balance. I've got to find out why. . . . What are the factors causing this?"

The chief looked at the instrument. "Thirty-one. Very slight fall."

"Fall?" Richards' eyebrows went up. He crossed to the big standard aneroid and tapped it. The needle of the aneroid dropped slightly at each tap.

"And still dropping," Richards said, grim-faced. "That just ought not to be. Something's got to be done, and quickly. Get me a detailed report on all these dial readings. I'll take them back to London."

The station chief complied and, within half an hour, Richards was back once more in his plane,

frowning to himself as the pilot lurched the machine through cloudless heaven as fast as the jets could take it.

Once back in London, Richards did not hesitate for a moment. He went direct to C1 headquarters and laid his information before Denham. Denham listened and then scowled through the reports Richards had brought back with him.

"Doesn't make sense to me," he said finally. "How can you get a falling barometer in an anticyclone? We've got a high pressure area clean to the west coast of America on one side, to mid-Europe on the other. The damned barometer must be wrong."

"Not that one," Richards bit his lower lip worriedly. "It's one of the best instruments made. I'll check on it, though."

He reached to the intercom and switched it on.

As he responded he said curtly:

"Give me London-control. Chief engineer."

In another moment the engineer replied: "Yes, Mr. Denham?"

"This isn't Mr. Denham; it's Richards. Give me your barometric reading, please."

A pause, then: "Thirty-one, slight fall."

"Thanks. How do your climatic-station indicators read?"

"One to five-degree disturbance as some move northwards."

"Thanks. Notify any other change."

Richards switched off and met the grim blue eyes of Denham across the desk. His cigar, projecting from his jaws, had gone out.

"Identical," Richards said. "London and Spitzbergen show the same readings. But why, in heaven's name? What's upsetting them?"

"Probably one of the machines isn't functioning properly. That would cause disturbance on instruments, though not enough to be noticed by the eye. Everything looks all right—no clouds, no wind."

"Yet the high pressure's falling," Richards insisted.

Denham lit his extinguished cigar and looked at the reports again. Richards wandered to the window and gazed steadily down on to the city, his mind trying to find a way around the problem. He waited when, for a moment, Denham suddenly snapped his fingers.

"Richards, I've got an idea. . . ."

Richards came over to him. "Well? Let's have it."

"Pressure's falling from the north: that's established. Very well, what have we in the north—"

"Only the escape-valve area. I checked on the disturbance that might be expected from that."

"We have more than the escape-valve area. We have a penitentiary, and in it there's David Brook," Richards stated. "Well? How does David Brook fit in?"

"I tell you I don't know. I can only say that David Brook is our sworn enemy, and extremely knowledgeable as far as climate control is concerned. . . . Let me think for a moment."

Richards frowned to himself and drew hard on his cigar. After a while he sighed and tightened his lips.

"Don't see there's anything he could do. I should have wiped him out to begin with and been sure. He can't," Denham stopped, whipping his cigar from his mouth. "Say, wait a minute! I've just remembered something. A requisition I had to okay some time ago."

Richards waited, completely in the dark, as Denham switched on the intercom to his secretary and spoke briefly.

"About a year ago, Miss Bennett, a request was received by us from Arctic penitentiary for some electrical equipment. I remember I had to okay it. Would you turn it up, please, and let me have it right away?"

"Certainly, Mr. Denham."

Denham switched off and looked at the puzzled Richards.

"I believe I've got it, Richards, and if I have you're troubles can soon be over. It's all my own fault for not disposing of young Brook sooner. I was wrong in my belief that he ought to sweat it out and die from sheer monotony."

"What's this about electrical equipment? I don't recall anything of that nature."

"Hardly likely, since I never told you. Electrical staff was ordered for the prison extensions—"

Denham broke off as the astute Miss Bennett came into the office with a folder. She laid it on the desk.

"There it is, sir. Anything further?"

"No, thanks."

The woman left. Denham opened the file and studied the contents, then he clapped his hands together in sudden satisfaction.

"Richards, we've got it! The governor of Arctic penitentiary ordered a mass of equipment, and at first sight it looks normal enough, but just read it for yourself. You know as much about building a climatic machine as I do."

Richards took the file and pored over it. He made one or two calculations and sketches on the desk scratchpad, and then finally he looked up at Denham.

"These requirements are exactly what one would require to build a couple of climatic machines."

"A couple?" Denham repeated in surprise.

"Certainly. There are two of everything—even two atomic generators."

"In case of failure of any one part," Denham said, thinking. "Yes, that will be it—But you gather the drift now, I suppose?"

"Naturally you'll go over personally and find out what's going on?"

"Not I! Denham got to his feet and drew hard on his cigar again. "Do you take me for an idiot, man? For one thing, I don't relish having to fly in that tempest spot, and for another it's possible that the whole prison in such a state would break if I'd be shot down before I could even approach it. No, this calls for something really drastic if we're to keep climatic control and save our own skins."

"Nothing less than blowing Arctic pen out of the earth—destroy the whole building, the inmates, and the secret climatic machine," Denham clenched his fists. "Give them no time to argue, no warning—Just drop a couple of nuclear bombs on the pen and that will be the end of that."

* * *

An hour later the air patrol fleet departed in strength, two of the machines carrying a bomb each, and they would blow the death knell to the capable of liquidating a medium-size city. Denham, seated in his office, and Richards in London-control, both watched the flight through their telescopes and what they saw gave them every satisfaction.

As the Arctic penitentiary how into view, situated on the main Arctic plateau, and lashed by the driving rain and winds, there was no sign of opposition—indeed it was the only advantage that was impossible, with their limited resources, to deal with an armed fleet. Whatever the reason, the bombs were dropped according to plan, with all their destructive and far-reaching violence.

When the job was finished there was nothing but a crater where the penitentiary and extensions had been. Swiftly the fleet turned about and then returned to the London base. The job was done and Denham relaxed with satisfaction. David Brook and his machinations had been well and truly dealt with.

Richards, for his part, switched off the television and then looked at his watch. An hour had passed since the actual bombing of the pen, so there ought to be a change just starting to register on the various climatic-control indicators and also the barometer. He left his office to investigate and presently entered the main power-room of the building.

A shock awaited him as he gazed at the meters connected with the other stations. There was no sign of a return to "O" and normality. If anything, there was a slight increase from "S" to "T."

"It's incredible," Richards whispered to himself, and he went to the barometer to check the return to the tap he gave it, the needle flickered slightly on the downward scale, giving a drop of nearly a quarter of an inch of pressure.

That was enough for Richards. He left the power-room and went by the shortest route to Denham's headquarters, catching him just as he was about to leave the office for the day.

"Presumably not different, Mr. Denham!" he exclaimed. "Pressure is still falling, and the climatic stations show an added disturbance."

He swung actively to the radio, always connected with the other climatic machines. In a moment he was speaking to the controller of the Spitzbergen station.

"Denham here. Emergency meter in contact and rising on the London station. How are things coming out at Spitz?"

"Bad," the engineer answered briefly. "Emergency meter also operating here. It's reached 32, and the maximum's 50. If I don't cut out our station while the fault's traced we're in danger of exploding."

"You'll not cut anything until I say so," Denham snapped. "The fault isn't in your station, or in London-control. It's in the atmosphere itself. An opposing atmospheric stream is being forced across our system from both north and south of the globe, but we'll not let it show. Stand by for further instructions."

He switched off—then on again to the Bouvet Islands, the southernmost station. As the engineer in charge of the station repeated the details he had given to Spitzbergen. The response did not cheer him much.

"Emergency reading of 40, sir. I don't know what's gone wrong, but when it gets near 50 we'll have to cut or go up in smoke."

"You'll not cut till I say so," Denham was sweating, his eyes on his own meter. The finger was chafing at the danger scale.

"I'm not willing for your authority, Mr. Denham," the southern engineer retorted. "I'm in control of this station and I know danger when I see it. I'm not going to commit suicide for anybody."

Denham switched off, feeling very much like a man chained before the path of an advancing juggernaut. Courage he had in plenty, and he would fight anything he could see and understand—but how did one fight this? A creeping tide of extraneous atmospheric pressure from north and south which was gaining a hold every second. Though he could not understand how it was happening, he knew perfectly well that somehow two other climatic machines had been built and were working in opposition, apparently—as far as the northward ones were concerned—unaffected by the nuclear bomb attack.

"Shall I—cut?" asked the deputy-chief, satisfied, as Denham tried to wrestle with the problem.

"Not yet! Let me think. . . . We're at the mercy of our own machines. The climatic atmospheric drifts which we usually hold at bay with our machines—"

"We can't fight that kind of pressure," the deputy chief said, "and we can't hold it off without going full bell, and even then we wouldn't do it. Things have advanced too far."

Denham's eyes fixed on the emergency needle. It was still creeping upward on the dial.

"Give me an order," the deputy insisted, clutching Denham's arm. "If you don't, I'll act for myself. I've got to, sir. The whole city will be in danger if this station blows up under the pressure."

Denham took a deep breath. "All right—cut out every machine and let the others manage as best they can. It may give us a brief respite in London. . . ."

The engineer hesitated no longer. He snatched up a telephone and sent his orders to various parts of the great control-room, then he himself seized a master lever and pulled it sharply out of contact.

The dropping wave of vibratory machines ceased and whirled down into silence. Instantly the emergency indicator dropped to zero—but only because power had ceased to flow into it.

Silence reigned. Denham, twisting on the floor from his face with the back of his sleeve. The radio buzzed for attention. He turned and switched it on.

"Denham speaking. London-control."

"Spitzbergen station, sir. I can't hold out any more. The emergency indicator registers 49 and—"

Suddenly the voice ceased and in the speaker there came an overwhelming crash and then silence. Denham looked up to meet the deputy's grim eyes.

"The Spitz station," he said. "What do we do now? If all the stations go?"

"I don't know. Have to see what happens. . . . I'll go up in my office and work something out. Keep me in touch."

"Yes, sir."

Denham turned and went slowly down the gangway, bewildered by events. He hardly remembered as he went that he was twisting on the floor, he went over to his swivel chair and sat down. Then he stared in front of him, still wrestling mentally with the problem. He was sure there ought to be a way out, but he saw none.

Finally he got to his feet again and opened the window. The air in the office seemed intolerably close, despite the fact that he was still in shirt sleeves. He looked out for a while at the lights of the city. Everything seemed intensely

penalty meter also operating here. It's reached 32, and the maximum's 50. If I don't cut out our station while the fault's traced we're in danger of exploding."

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He switched off—then on again to the Bouvet Islands, the southernmost station. As the engineer in charge of the station repeated the details he had given to Spitzbergen. The response did not cheer him much.

"Emergency reading of 40, sir. I don't know what's gone wrong, but when it gets near 50 we'll have to cut or go up in smoke."

"You'll not cut till I say so," Denham was sweating, his eyes on his own meter. The finger was chafing at the danger scale.

"I'm not willing for your authority, Mr. Denham," the southern engineer retorted. "I'm in control of this station and I know danger when I see it. I'm not going to commit suicide for anybody."

Denham switched off, feeling very much like a man chained before the path of an advancing juggernaut. Courage he had in plenty, and he would fight anything he could see and understand—but how did one fight this? A creeping tide of extraneous atmospheric pressure from north and south which was gaining a hold every second.

Though he could not understand how it was happening, he knew perfectly well that somehow two other climatic machines had been built and were working in opposition, apparently—as far as the northward ones were concerned—unaffected by the nuclear bomb attack.

"Shall I—cut?" asked the deputy-chief, satisfied, as Denham tried to wrestle with the problem.

"Not yet! Let me think. . . . We're at the mercy of our own machines. The climatic atmospheric drifts which we usually hold at bay with our machines—"

"We can't fight that kind of pressure," the deputy chief said, "and we can't hold it off without going full bell, and even then we wouldn't do it. Things have advanced too far."

Denham's eyes fixed on the emergency needle. It was still creeping upward on the dial.

"Give me an order," the deputy insisted, clutching Denham's arm. "If you don't, I'll act for myself. I've got to, sir. The whole city will be in danger if this station blows up under the pressure."

Denham took a deep breath. "All right—cut out every machine and let the others manage as best they can. It may give us a brief respite in London. . . ."

The engineer hesitated no longer. He snatched up a telephone and sent his orders to various parts of the great control-room, then he himself seized a master lever and pulled it sharply out of contact.

The dropping wave of vibratory machines ceased and whirled down into silence. Instantly the emergency indicator dropped to zero—but only because power had ceased to flow into it.

Silence reigned. Denham, twisting on the floor from his face with the back of his sleeve. The radio buzzed for attention. He turned and switched it on.

"Denham speaking. London-control."

"Spitzbergen station, sir. I can't hold out any more. The emergency indicator registers 49 and—"

Suddenly the voice ceased and in the speaker there came an overwhelming crash and then silence. Denham looked up to meet the deputy's grim eyes.

"The Spitz station," he said. "What do we do now? If all the stations go?"

"I don't know. Have to see what happens. . . . I'll go up in my office and work something out. Keep me in touch."

"Yes, sir."

Denham turned and went slowly down the gangway, bewildered by events. He hardly remembered as he went that he was twisting on the floor, he went over to his swivel chair and sat down. Then he stared in front of him, still wrestling mentally with the problem. He was sure there ought to be a way out, but he saw none.

Finally he got to his feet again and opened the window. The air in the office seemed intolerably close, despite the fact that he was still in shirt sleeves. He looked out for a while at the lights of the city. Everything seemed intensely

calm and still: it did not seem to have made any difference shutting off the London-control machine.

"Mr. Denham . . ."
He turned, starting. He had not heard the desk ops. The senior chief was standing by the desk, his face pale.

"I'm afraid we're in for trouble, Mr. Denham."
"I rather expected we would be," Denham smiled bitterly. "What's the latest news?"

"Bad—all of it. None of the stations reply except the one in Northern Canada. They report that their particular station is at maximum danger position . . . by moonlight and starlight. They also report rapid cloud drift from the north. I've picked up radio reports from the principal cities and they all tell of the collapse of weather control. Some report earthquakes, others floods and tornadoes. There's a great belt of violently disturbed conditions sweeping down from the north. We can't hope to sidestep it. . . . I think I should warn the public, Mr. Denham. They might be able to protect themselves. Climatic control is gone—for the time being, anyway."

"Yes," Denham muttered. "Yes, I'll tell the public Thanks for the information, Mr. Denham." The deputy senior chief and Denham looked at the radio. It was up to him to sign his own death warrant—to tell the public that climatic control had broken down and that disastrous disturbances were on the way, were already battering the northern half of the world and advancing at unknown speed.

Denham looked again through the window. The stars were still plotting in the still sky. The air was motionless. The last shards of climatic control were still functioning.

"Why tell them and cut my own throat?" Denham asked himself. "Afterwards there may still be time to get things right. . . ."
"There'll never be time for that, Denham!" Denham swung, open-mouthed. A tall man in a leather flying jacket was already hurrying toward the desk, the glint of murder in his eyes.

"David! David Brook!" Denham ejaculated, staring. "It—a can't be!"

CHAPTER IX

"I can be, and it is!" David said, reaching for the desk. "It took more than Arctic penitentiaries to hold me. I warned you about that, remember? I said I'd come back—and now I've done it."

Denham moved slowly. "How? How did you do it?"
"I'll sum everything up in a few words, Denham. I came back to settle accounts with you—to settle up for my father, my mother, my fiancée, and myself. You've beaten, Denham, and everybody's against you, even the innocent 'criminals' you've had incarcerated in Arctic and Antarctic."

Denham fumbled for a cigar, stuck it in his mouth, but did not light it. His blue eyes fixed on David's expressionless face.

"Do we look at each other for the rest of the night?" Denham asked at last, controlling himself. "You're a man of action, David. You've got to work, am I. Therefore—"

"Shut up!" David interrupted. "And keep shut until I tell you a few things. First, climatic control is ended; because opposition machines are at work at both Poles. You made an attempt to wreck the Arctic machine, as I thought you would—and you made a good job of destroying the Arctic pen. On the other hand, the machine is gone, and no machinery either. You were outwitted, Denham."

Denham said nothing. He lit his cigar and waited. The heat seemed stifling again, even though the window was wide open to the stillness of the night.

"The inmates of the pen moved out to natural caves," David went on. "Caves that were part of the plateau itself, and some distance from the site of the pen. It was easy to do that since underground excavations had been made for the prison extensions. Down there the opposition machine was built. I saw that. Every detail, from the plans and notes made by my father. When your bombers came along they simply shook things as far as we were concerned—and nothing more. We were protected by rock from blast and shock waves. We had all the power we needed to work our generators—power from the temper-dri-

cean itself. . . . You still listening, Denham?"

Denham did not speak. His ear was cocked to a curious rumbling sound outside. Probably heavy traffic, or else far distant thunder. David continued in his simple, direct way. "David concludes, Denham. I haven't got a gun, thanks to using the clothes of one of the men in the plane. There's no law against coming up to your office, so the hall commissioner didn't stop me. . . . It's all quite simple, really."

"And melodramatic," Denham commented, knocking the ash from his cigar into the brass ashtray. "Well, what next? Now you've managed to wreck the climatic machines and return to safety, what happens?"

"To safety?" David shook his head. "I've returned to a bigger hell than you imagine. By this time it's up to your subject matter, he either exploded or been overwhelmed by the advancing tide of natural air currents. Those currents are going to sweep the globe and create terrific disturbances as they form once again into normal pulses. So far London hasn't been touched, but will be—then it will be every man for himself. Before that happens, I want some information from you."

"Where do I find Ruth Dorney?"
Denham hesitated, then the look in David's eyes destroyed his reticence.

"Where do I find her headquarters?" And don't try to pull anything, Denham. If you tell me a lie, I'll come back and get the truth. It's located at the corner of Two and Six intersection in the city centre. You can see the position from the window here."

Denham got to his feet and went across the office. He stood before him as he reached the window, the tycoon suddenly grabbed by the throat, forcing him by sheer bull-like strength toward the open window. David was surprised. He saw the glint of a balance scale, the low frame, and he might even have gained through it toward the city lights far below had a sudden tremendous concussion not upset Denham's calculations.

It was more than a concussion: it was a gulping and straining of the earth itself, accompanied by an ever-increasing, rumbling growl. The floor shook, sending both Denham and David reeling back to the office. Glass splintered, window frames buckled, and the big light globe in the ceiling began to swing back and forth like a pendulum.

"Earthquake," Denham panted, releasing David abruptly. "That's what it is, isn't it?"

David did not answer. Instead he drew back his fist and then slammed it home with all the force of his hard young muscles. Back of the blow was the tremendous and fury he had been pent back. He watched Denham stagger backwards, stagger over the big desk, and crash beyond it to the floor—then David was out of the office and in the corridor, his mind on one thing only. He had got to find Ruth Dorney, and quickly, before earthquake and climatic upheaval brought the city to ruin.

He was not far as the elevator when the second shock came. The floor swayed crazily and fissures ripped up the walls with the noise of a dozen guns. The lights went out. In the darkness confusion of the second falling masonry, hoarse shouts, the clang of alarm bells. David clutched the trembling wall and looked about him. He saw the staircase and dived for it, his way lit by the lightning flash of lightning.

With the noise of thunder and earth tremor dining in his ears he rushed down flight after flight of stairs, dodging and pacing his way through a milling crowd of panic-stricken employees. In the lower reaches of the tower building the confusion was absolute. Darkness, and the failure of the emergency lighting only added to the chaos. From experience, David knew where the main hallway door was, and he fought his way to it through struggling, shouting men and women.

As he passed through it there came another tremor. It flung David helplessly down the side of the building. He crashed on his back, wincing with the lightning scared of his eyes. For a moment and his wide-open eyes beheld an unbelievable and terrifying sight. The huge central mass of the C.I. building, with Denham's office at the top, it was, leaning far outwards, toppling—

David scrambled to his feet as the darkness shut down again. He ran and ran. It didn't matter where as long as he got free of the falling building. Ruth suddenly smote him in a deluge as he floundered on. Behind him the central face of the C.I. edifice loomed, and he was in a swirl of dust, masonry and steel. The thick, sultry air was abruptly pierced by frantic screams.

David slowed to a halt. He had missed the collapse of the building and saving his life was no need to run any more. But he had to find Ruth—somehow. Bewildered, he looked about him. Rain was streaming down in solid sheets, pouring into the cracks and puddles. There had been the sound of lightning, but no lightning bolts, and no wind. Some of it tumbling into the chasms, other parts of it flung in all directions as though a giant's hammer had struck it.

He swung round and raced back to the mountains of debris. Already there were hundreds of rescuers at work, men and women from the C.I. building who had escaped the general collapse, but even so there were still a great deal of work to be done. David, his way illumined by the lightning, climbed a mountain of rain-slippery masonry and dropped to the other side. He caught a glimpse of a man and woman, and then he was alone. He started towards them and then paused, staring. He didn't see a man or a woman.

Now he was certain. A dazzling flash of lightning leapt from the sky. A jagged trench cut the earth, built up on two sides by vast mountains of rubble. But in the trench were two skeletons.

Skeletons? He went forward at last, everything nakedly clear to his eyes. The lightning flashed, and the trench cleared. He got to the skeletons finally and stood staring at them deep in the trench. The trench was neat and perfectly cut. It had probably housed a wall before the collapse. . . .

In a wind of oblong space, a paper began to move, stirred from the ribs of the bigger skeleton. David moved for it, seized it, and started to unfold it. As he did so he looked into the trench. There was a wall there, with part of the contents spewed out.

He opened the oblong paper slowly. It had already become sodden with rain. Dirt smeared with mud and left streaks which ran down beneath. But David saw enough. . . . It was an agreement, and the names of Alvin Brook and Marcus Denham were evident.

About the edges of the situation struck home to David. The wallet tumbled out of his quivering hands. He knew now whose skeletons these were. Originally the bodies must have been behind a party wall or something. . . . Oh, what did it matter? For a moment or two he didn't care any more. He crouched in the trench, fast filling with water, and fumbled with quivering hands for any other relics which might be there. He found one—a ear-ring with an imitation emerald. As it lay in his palm he remembered. It had belonged, with its fellow, to his mother. He himself had given it to her as a wedding present. . . .

Suddenly David found himself crying. It was the only possible way in which his mind could find relief. And he kept on crying until danger signals around him insisted on being noticed. For one thing, the rain was no longer a simple drizzle, it was rising pale with sweeping chunks of masonry out of the shattered C.I. building, chunks which would hit him if he didn't move quickly.

Forced to realities, he jumped out of the trench and then proceeded to claw his way up the greasy masses of stone and twisted metal. He encountered rescuers coming in the opposite direction but he paid no attention to them—or they to him. . . . Back of him, now, in the air, there was another, he thought he had got to try and find Ruth, somehow. In the matter of more local rescue there was nothing he could do.

Through the blur ahead he could vaguely make out the position of the Intersection at Two and Six square with which he was fairly familiar from experience, but between him and his goal were shattered buildings, blaring ambulances, fallen pedestrians, and a hell of a lot of other things. He was powerless. . . . He came to a stop, breathless, as the wind increased its fury and strove mightily to tear him from his feet.

As he stood there, back to the hurricane, his eyes fixed on two blinding lights coming towards him. A car-bomb blared savagely, driving out of the way the scurrying men and women, and even passing a mob of people who were perilously into a mass of rubble to avoid collision.

VIGNETTES OF LIFE

Appointments

by HARRY WEINERT

